



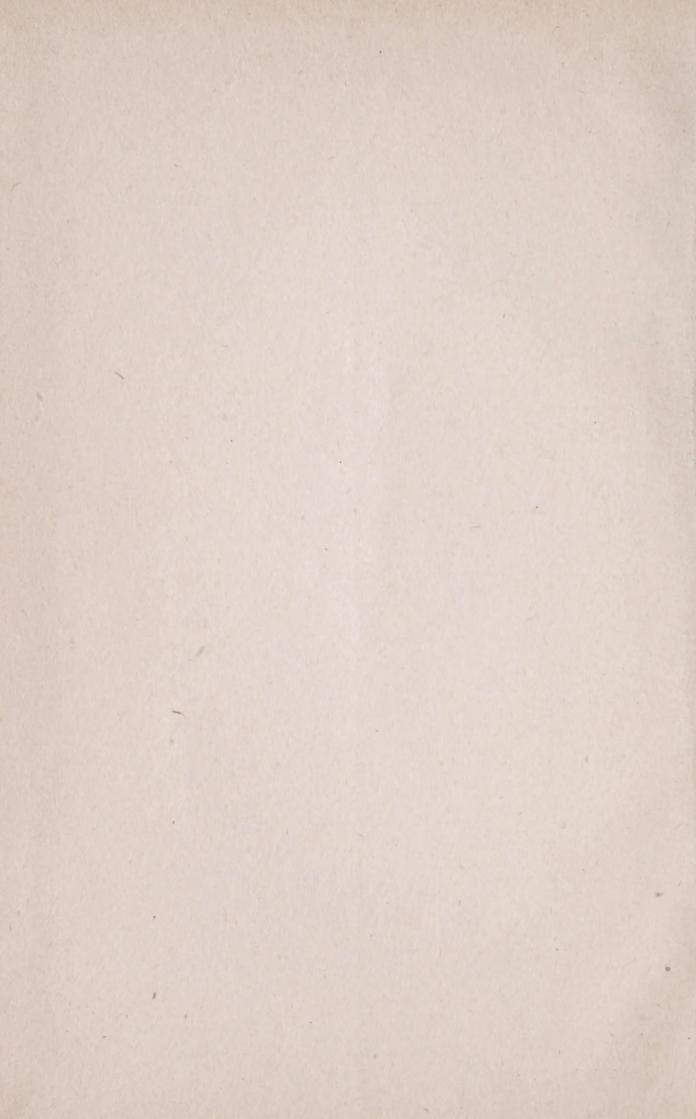
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THE PIONEER BOYS OF THE COLUMBIA



OR: IN THE WILDERNESS OF THE GREAT NORTHWEST

THE YOUNG PIONEER SERIES

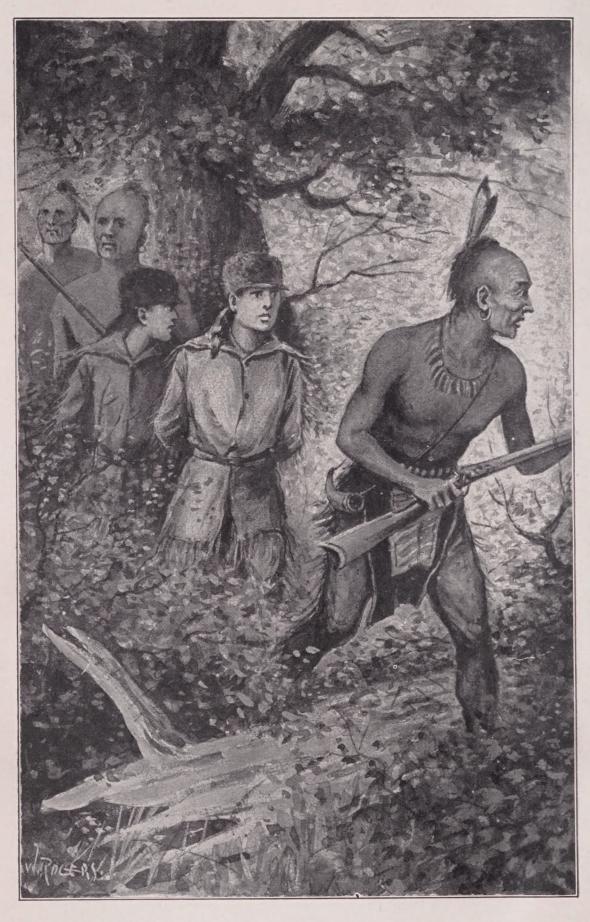
BY HARRISON ADAMS ILLUSTRATED



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"THE TWO BOYS HAD TO . . . START UPON THE LONG JOURNEY INTO THE NORTHWEST" (See page 148)

St. George Rothbonne

The Young Pioneer Series

THE PIONEER BOYS OF THE COLUMBIA

OR: IN THE WILDERNESS OF THE GREAT NORTHWEST

By HARRISON ADAMS pseud

Author of "The Pioneer Boys of the Ohio," "The Pioneer Boys of the Missouri," "The Pioneer Boys of the Yellowstone," etc.



Illustrated by WALTER S. ROGERS

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PREFACE

DEAR BOYS:-

The time has at last arrived when we must say good-bye to our pioneer friends, the Armstrongs. You will remember how we have followed their adventurous careers down the Ohio, along the Mississippi, then up the great Missouri to the wonder country of the Yellowstone; and now, between the covers of the present volume, are narrated the concluding incidents in the story of "Westward Ho!"

Our country is deeply indebted to the class of pioneers typified by the Armstrong boys. Restless spirits many of them were, always yearning for richer lands where game would be more plentiful. It was undoubtedly this desire that led them further and further into the "Country of the Setting Sun," constantly seeking that which many of them never found; until at length the Pacific barred their further progress.

Bob and Sandy Armstrong, together with their sturdy sons, Dick and Roger, are but types of the settlers who opened up the rich territory of the Mississippi Valley, as well as the Great West. Their kind is not so numerous now, at least in our own country, since the need for such adventurous souls has become less acute. In many places, however, like the Canadian Northwest, they can still be met with, forging the links that will bind the wilderness to civilization.

If you boys have found one half the enjoyment in reading of the exploits of our young pioneers that the task has afforded the author in writing of them, his aim, which has been to instruct as well as to entertain, will have been accomplished.

HARRISON ADAMS.

May 1, 1916.





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The Pioneer Boys of the Columbia

CHAPTER I

THE LURE OF THE SETTING SUN

"IT strikes me, Dick, the rapids are noisier to-day than ever before."

"We have time enough yet, Roger, to paddle ashore, and give up our plan of running them."

"But that would be too much like showing the white feather, Cousin; and you must know that we Armstrongs never like to do that."

"Then we are to try our luck in the midst of the snarling, white-capped water-wolves, are we, Roger?"

"I say, 'yes.' We started to make the run, and a little extra noise isn't going to frighten us off. Besides, we may not have another chance to try it."

"You're right there, Roger, for I heard Cap-

tain Lewis say we'd have to start up the river again in a few days, heading into the great West, the Land of the Setting Sun."

"I am ready, Dick. My paddle can be depended on to see us through. We'll soon be at the head of the rapids, too."

"Already the canoe feels the pull, and races to meet it. Steady now, Roger, and let us remember what the Indians told us about the only safe passage through the Big Trouble Water, as they call it. A little more to the left—now straight ahead, and both together!"

The two sturdy, well-grown lads who crouched in the frail Indian craft, made of tanned buffalo skins, need no introduction to those who have read any of the preceding volumes of this series.

There may be those, however, who, in these pages, are making the acquaintance of Dick and Roger, the young pioneers, for the first time; and for their benefit a little explanation may be necessary.

While the pair are shooting downward, on the rapidly increasing current of the Yellowstone River, toward the roaring rapids, on this spring day in the year 1805, let us take a brief look backward. Who were these daring lads of the old frontier days, and how came they so far

from the westernmost settlements of the English-speaking race along the Mississippi, and about the mouth of the Missouri?

Dick Armstrong and his cousin, Roger, were the sons of two brothers whose adventures along the Ohio in the days of Daniel Boone occupied our attention in the earlier stories of border life. They were worthy of their fathers, for Dick had inherited the thoughtful character of Bob Armstrong, while Roger at times displayed the same bold disposition that had always marked Sandy, his parent, in the perilous days when they founded their homes in the then untrodden wilderness.

The families were now located at that spot which had first been taken up by the French, and called St. Louis in honor of the King of France. Their grandfather, David Armstrong, still lived, as did also his wife, hale and hearty, enjoying the increasing households of their children.

Bob and Sandy had both married, and besides Dick there was a smaller son, named Sam in the cabin of the former. Roger had a little sister, called Mary, in honor of her grandmother.

The two cousins had grown up, as did most lads of those early days, accustomed to think for themselves, and to meet danger bravely.

Both of them were accomplished in all the arts known to successful woodsmen. They learned from experience, as well as from the lips of old borderers who visited in their homes, and were able to hold their own with any boys of their age in the community.

A sudden calamity threatened to disturb the peace of the Armstrong circle, when it was learned that there was a flaw in the deed by which their property was held. An important signature was required in order to perfect this title, and, unless this could be obtained, and shown by the succeeding spring, everything would pass into the possession of a rich and unscrupulous French Indian trader, François Lascelles by name.

Inquiry developed the fact that Jasper Williams, the man whose signature was so important to the happiness of all the Armstrongs, had gone with the expedition undertaken by Captain Lewis and Captain Clark, which was headed into the unknown country of the Setting Sun, with the hope of finding a way to the far distant Pacific Ocean.

No white man had as yet crossed the vast stretches of country that lay west of the rolling Mississippi, and it was the boldest undertaking ever known when President Jefferson influenced Congress to stand back of his proposition to learn the extent of the possessions that had recently come to the United States. (Note 1.) ¹

The President's private secretary, Captain Lewis, headed the small party of adventurous spirits, assisted by an army officer, Captain Clark. They left St. Louis in the spring of 1804, and had been long on the way when the Armstrongs discovered that the one man whom they could depend on to save their homes was with the expedition.

Ordinarily Bob and Sandy Armstrong would have been quick to take upon themselves the duty of overtaking the expedition, and securing the necessary signature; but a recent injury prevented one of the brothers from going.

In the end the proposition of Dick and Roger to undertake the stupendous task was agreed to, and the boys started, mounted on two horses and equipped as well as the times permitted. The adventures they met with were thrilling in the extreme, and have been described at length in earlier volumes.²

¹ The notes will be found at the end of the book.

^{2 &}quot;The Pioneer Boys of the Missouri" and "The Pioneer Boys of the Yellowstone."

The youths overtook the expedition after it had gone far up the "Great Muddy," as the Missouri had already become known, and the coveted signature was obtained. Then the lads were tempted to continue with the party, since Captain Lewis was sending back one of his most trusted scouts with an account of what had already happened to the expedition, for the perusal of President Jefferson; and he could be trusted to see that the precious document reached the Armstrongs.

During the winter just passed the two boys were kept busy in the rôle of scouts and providers of fresh meat for the camp, a duty which their early training made them peculiarly fitted to assume.

The expedition had laid out a comfortable camp near the Indian village of the Mandan tribe, with whom peaceful relations had been established at the time of their first arrival in the neighborhood.

Some of the bolder spirits had ventured into the realm of natural wonders now known as Yellowstone Park, and had viewed with amazement and awe the strange geysers that spouted hot water hundreds of feet in the air at stated periods, as well as many other singular mysteries. Dick and Roger had been among the fortunate few to view these marvels; but, as a rule, the soldiers and bordermen associated with the two captains were almost as superstitious as the ignorant red men, and actually feared to set eyes on these strange freaks of Nature which they could not understand. The Indians called the place the Bad Lands, and believed an evil Manitou dwelt there, who was ever ready to seize upon and enchain those reckless warriors who should invade his territory.

Slowly the long winter had passed away, and all seemed to be going well. There had been occasional signs of trouble, when hostile hunting parties of Indians were encountered; but, thus far, none of the expedition had been more than wounded in these frays.

Spring was at last at hand, and every one in the party looked forward with eagerness to the fresh start that was soon to be made. They had gathered much information concerning the vast stretch of plains and mountains that still lay between them and their goal; but, since only Indians had ever penetrated that wilderness, these stories were invariably untrustworthy, for the mind of the red man was very much like that of a child, and could

see things only from an imaginative standpoint.

About all that the adventurers really knew was that there was a tremendous barrier of mountains which they must climb before they could hope to attain their ambitious aim and gaze upon the Pacific Ocean, seen at that time only by those, following Balboa, who had crossed the narrow isthmus where the Panama Canal now joins the rival oceans.

Every evening, when the sun was setting in a maze of glowing colors, Dick and Roger were accustomed to stand and watch until the last fiery finger had finally faded from the skies. To them that mysterious West held out beckoning arms. They never tired of talking about the fresh wonders they might gaze upon once they started into the trackless wilds; and their young souls were aflame with eagerness as the days crept along, each one bringing them closer to the hour of departure.

For some time they had intended to take a canoe through the big rapids of the river, which they had passed in ascending the stream, before making the winter camp. From the Indians they had secured all possible information, and finally, knowing that their time here was now

short, they had set forth with the canoe that had been their property for months, bent upon undertaking the rather risky voyage.

If the daring canoe-man knows his course, the passing through a rapid, amidst all the foam and rush of hungry waters, is not the perilous thing it seems. Besides a knowledge of the way, all that is required is a bold heart, a quick eye, a stout paddle, and muscular arms to wield it.

The two lads soon entered the upper stretches of the white-capped water. They quickly picked out their course, and found themselves shooting downward with almost incredible speed. Around them on every hand was boiling, tumultuous water, curling and rushing and leaping as though eager to seize upon its prey.

Dick and his cousin were not at all dismayed. They had rubbed up against perils so often in their young lives that they could keep cool in the face of almost any danger. Roger crouched in the bow and fended off from the rocks, so that the glancing blows the boat received would not damage the tough skins of which the craft was made.

Dick occupied the stern, and his was the crafty hand that really guided the canoe, for Roger always acknowledged that his cousin could handle a paddle better than he could.

They had passed more than two-thirds of the way down the rapids, and the worst seemed to be behind them, when something strange happened.

The canoe struck a partly submerged, but perfectly smooth, rock. It was only a slight blow, and glancing at that, but nevertheless the results were startling. No sooner had the accident occurred than the bottom of the boat gaped open and the water rushed in with terrible speed. One look convinced Dick that it was quite hopeless to try to keep the craft afloat with their weight to force this flood through the hole.

"Quick! snatch up your gun, and jump overboard, Roger!" he shouted. "And hold on to the boat, remember, like grim death!"

Roger was nothing if not catlike in his actions when an emergency arose; and the two lads leaped over into the swirling water as one, ready to battle for their lives with the rapids, where the superstitious red men said the evil spirits dwelt amidst continual strife and warring.

CHAPTER II

WRECKED IN THE RAPIDS

When they made this sudden plunge, the two boys were careful to maintain their grip upon the sides of the boat, one being on the right and the other on the left. Relieved of their weight, the buoyant canoe would probably float, and might yet prove of considerable help to them in navigating the remainder of the boisterous rapids.

All pioneer boys early learned to swim like fishes. It was as much a part of their education as handling a gun, or acquiring a knowledge of woodcraft. The lad who was not proficient in all these things would have been hard to find, and had he been discovered, the chances were he would have been deemed a true mollycoddle, and fit only to wear the dresses of his sister, or, as the Indians would have described it, be a "squaw."

No sooner had Dick and Roger found themselves in the swift flowing waters than they struck out most manfully to keep themselves and the boat afloat. It was no new experience in their adventurous career, for before now they had more than once found themselves battling with a flood.

For a brief time it promised to be a most exciting experience, and one that would require their best endeavors if they hoped to come out alive at the foot of the rapids. To be hurled against some of the jutting spurs of rock with all the force of that speeding current would mean blows that would weaken their powers of resistance, and cause them to lose their grip on the side of the canoe.

There were times when they were almost overwhelmed by the dashing, foamy waters. In every instance, however, their pluck and good judgment served to carry them through the difficulty.

All the while they had the satisfaction of knowing that they must be drawing closer to the end of the rapids. Already Dick believed he could notice a little slackening of the fury with which they were beaten on all sides by the lashing waters. He managed to give a shout to encourage his cousin.

"Keep holding on, Roger; we are nearly at

the bottom! Another minute will take us into smoother water! Tighten your grip, and we shall win out yet!"

"I'm game to the finish!" was all Roger could say in reply, for every time he opened his mouth it seemed as though some of the riotous water would swoop over his head and almost choke him by forcing itself down his throat.

Before another minute was half over they had come to the foot of the rapids, and, still holding to the waterlogged canoe, floated out upon comparatively smooth water. Here amidst the foam and eddies they managed to push the boat toward the shore.

Roger was already laughing, a little hysterically it is true, for he had been tremendously worked up over the exciting affair. It might have ended in a tragedy for them; but, now that the peril was past, Roger could afford to act as if he saw only the humorous side of the accident.

"That was a very close call, Dick!" he ventured, as they continued to swim as best they could, holding their guns in the hands that at the same time clutched the gunwales of the boat.

"We rather expected it," replied Dick, "and laid our plans to meet an upset; but it came with

a rush, after all. Who'd ever believe such a little knock against a rock would have burst the tough skin of our hide boat?"

"Yes, and a perfectly smooth rock at that," added Roger, as though he knew this to a certainty, and it added to the mystery in his eyes. "I believed these boats were tough enough to stand ten times that amount of pounding. I believe after all I prefer our old style of dugout."

"Yes, they may be clumsy, but you can depend on them all the time; and after this I think I'll be suspicious about a hide boat," Dick continued.

The shore was now close at hand, and they found little difficulty in making a landing. At the same time the half sunken Indian boat was dragged up on the bank, and tipped over to relieve it of the water, though that began to pour out through the rent in the bottom as soon as it left the river.

It was only natural that the two boys should first throw themselves down on the soft bank to regain some of their breath after such an exciting time. Then, having been brought up in the school of preparedness, their next act was to examine their guns, and to renew the priming of powder in the pan, so that the weapons, on which they always depended to defend themselves against sudden perils, would be in condition for immediate use in case of necessity.

In those days old heads were to be found on young shoulders. Responsibility caused lads, hardly entering their teens, to become the defenders of their families, as well as hunters and trappers. And the Armstrong cousins had long filled a position of trust of this description in the home circles.

"Well, we shot the rapids, all right," remarked Roger, presently, with a whimsical smile; "but not exactly as we had planned. Now we can have the pleasure of walking back to camp. At least it saves us the bother of paddling all the way, after making a carry around the rapids. And we meant to give our boat to one of the Mandan boys, you remember, Dick."

"I'm puzzled about that boat," remarked the other, frowning.

"I suppose you mean you wonder what made it play such a treacherous trick on us, after standing the wear and tear of the winter," Roger observed.

"Yes, for you remember we examined it closely only yesterday, and made sure it was in perfect condition. Suppose we take a look at

that break, and see how it happened to come."

"Oh! the chances are," said Roger, carelessly, "the old hide became worn or weak through age, and gave way. Still," he added, "that was only a little bump, Dick, and I'm as bothered as you are how to explain it."

In another minute they were bending over the upturned canoe. Immediately both boys uttered exclamations of astonishment, as though they had made a discovery that gave them an unexpected thrill.

"Why, it looks as if a sharp knife blade had been drawn straight down along here, and cut nearly through the skin, so that even a little blow would finish it!" exclaimed Roger, turning his troubled eyes upon his cousin as if to ascertain whether the other agreed with him.

"That is exactly what has been done," added Dick, soberly. "See, you can even notice where the slit extends further than the break. This was not as much an accident as we thought, Roger. Some rascal, who knew what we expected to do, tried to bring about our destruction in the rapids!"

"But it must have been done since yesterday," declared the other angrily, "for we looked over every inch of the skin of the boat then, and surely would have noticed the deep scoring of a knife blade."

"There can be no doubt about that," agreed Dick. "And the work was skillfully done in the bargain. Whoever made that cut expected that the boat would strike against rocks many times during the run of the rapids, and took chances that one of the blows would tear open the weak place. And that is what happened."

"It would have gone much harder with us if we had not been most of the way down the descent," said Roger, with a frown on his face. "But, Dick, who could the treacherous rascal be? As far as we know, we have not made a single enemy among the members of the party. Would one of our Indian friends have played such a mean trick on us, do you think?"

"No one but an enemy could have done it, Roger, because there was nothing to gain; for while some Indians might envy us our rifles these would surely be lost with us in the rapids and never recovered."

"That makes the mystery worse than ever, then," fretted the other lad, who was so constituted that among his boy friends down along the Missouri he had often gone under the name of "Headstrong Roger."

"I have a suspicion, although there is really nothing to back it up, that I can see," remarked Dick, reflectively, as though at some time in the past winter he had allowed himself to speculate concerning certain things which were now again taking possession of his mind.

"Dick, tell me what it is about, please," urged his cousin, "because I'm groping in the dark, myself."

"There is only one man that I know of who hates us bitterly," commenced Dick, and instantly a flash of intelligence overspread the face of the other.

"Do you mean that French trader, François Lascelles?" he demanded.

"I was thinking of him, and his equally unscrupulous son, Alexis," Dick admitted.

"But, when we captured them last fall, they were held prisoners in the camp until Mayhew, the scout, was well on his way down the river and could not possibly be overtaken. Then the party of Frenchmen was let go, with the solemn warning from Captain Lewis that if any of them loitered around this region they would be shot on sight. And Dick, all winter long you remember we have seen nothing of Lascelles, or indeed for that matter any other white man."

"Still," urged the other, "he may have come back here again when he found he could not overtake Mayhew and secure that paper. A man like François Lascelles hates bitterly, and never forgives. To be beaten in his game by a couple of mere boys would make him gnash his teeth every time he remembered it. Yes, something seems to tell me, Roger, that our old enemy has returned, and is even now in communication with some treacherous member of the expedition."

"You mean his money has hired some one to play this terrible trick that might have cost us our lives; is that it, Dick?"

"It is only a guess with me," replied the other, soberly; "but I can see no other explanation of this mystery."

"But who could be the guilty man in the camp?" asked Roger. "We believed every one was our friend, from the two captains down to the lowest in line. It is terrible to suspect any one of a crime like this. How will we ever be able to find out about it, do you think?"

"We must begin to keep our eyes about us and watch," advised Dick. "One by one we can cross the names off our list until it narrows

and Garage

down to two or three. Sooner or later we shall find out the truth."

"Do you mean to tell Captain Lewis about the knife-slit along the bottom of our boat?" demanded Roger.

"It is our duty to tell him," Dick declared.
"The man who could stoop to such a trick as that, just for love of money, is not fit to stay in the ranks of honest explorers. Once we can show him the proof, I am sure Captain Lewis will kick the rascal out of camp. But I can see that you are beginning to shiver, Roger; so the first thing we ought to do now is to make a fire, and dry our clothes as best we may."

"I was just going to say that myself, Dick, because this spring air is sharp, with little heat in the sun. To tell you the honest truth my teeth are beginning to rattle like those bones the Mandan medicine man shakes, when he dances to frighten off the evil spirit that has entered the body of a sick man. So let's gather some wood and make a blaze."

With that, both boys began to bestir themselves, first of all slapping their arms back and forth to induce circulation; after which they started to collect dry wood in a heap. At no time, however, did they let their precious guns leave their possession, for they knew that when fire-arms were needed it was usually in a hurry, and to save life.

CHAPTER III

WOLVES IN THE TIMBER

"Let me light the pile, Dick," Roger pleaded, after they had made sufficient preparation.

They had selected only dry wood for various reasons. In the first place, this would burn more readily, and thus throw off the heat they wanted in order to dry their clothes. At the same time it was likely to make little smoke that could be seen by the eyes of any hostile Indians who might be within a mile or so of the spot.

Boys who lived in those pioneer days always carried flint and steel along with them, in order to kindle a blaze when necessary. Had these been lacking, Roger, no doubt, would have been equal to the occasion, for he could have flashed some powder in the pan of his gun, and thus accomplished his purpose. (Note 2.)

In a short time Roger, being expert in these lines, succeeded, by the use of flint and steel, as well as some fine tinder, which he always carried along with him in his ditty bag, in starting a fire.

The wood blazed up and sent out a most gratifying heat, so that both boys, by standing as close as they could bear it, began to steam, very much after the manner of some of the warm geysers, during the stated periods when they were not spouting, that the lads had looked upon in the Land of Wonders.

"What shall we do about the boat?" asked Roger, when they found that they were by degrees getting dry, though it took a long time to accomplish this desired end.

"I was thinking about that," his cousin told him. "It is not worth while for us to try to patch the hole, because we expect to abandon it very soon. Captain Lewis asked us to be with him in his boat. We had better leave it here, and perhaps they may send a couple of Indians down to fetch it to camp."

"You mean, Dick, if the captain wishes to see for himself the mark of the treacherous knife blade?"

"Which I think he will want to do, so as to settle it in his own mind," returned the other. "This is, after all, the most terrifying thing that has as yet happened to us on our long journey up here into the heart of the wilderness."

"That is just it, Dick. Open foes I can stand,

because you know what to expect; but it gives me a creep to think of some unknown person standing ready to stab us in the dark, or when our backs are turned. Perhaps, after all, we did wrong to decide on staying with Captain Lewis and Captain Clark, when we might have gone on home with Mayhew, carrying that precious paper."

"Oh! I wouldn't look at it that way, Roger," said the other, striving to cheer him up, for Roger was subject to sudden fits of depression. "Just think of all the wonderful things we have seen while here; and then remember that there are still other strange sights awaiting us in the Land of the Setting Sun."

"Yes, that's so, Dick, and both of us decided that the chance to look upon the great ocean was one not to be lightly cast aside."

"We've been lucky so far," Dick told his chum, "and succeeded in everything we have undertaken; so even this new trouble mustn't upset us. By keeping a sharp lookout we can expect to learn who the traitor is, and after that he will be forced to leave the party. And if that Lascelles is around here again he will have to look out for himself. Anyhow," he added after a pause, "we have gone too far now to turn

back, no matter whether we made a mistake or not."

"Yes, and as my father used to say," continued Roger, "what can't be cured must be endured. We have made our bed, and must lie in it, no matter how hard it may seem. I'm going to believe just as you do, Dick—that the same kind fate that has always watched over us in times past is still on duty."

He glanced upward toward the blue sky as he said this, and Dick knew what he intended to imply; for boys in those days were reared in a religious atmosphere in their humble homes, and early learned to "trust in the Lord; but keep their powder dry," as the Puritan Fathers used to do.

"Our fathers often had to meet situations just as dangerous as any that can come to us," continued Dick, "and they grappled them boldly and came off victorious. So, from now on, we'll devote ourselves to finding out whose was the unseen hand that held the knife with which our hide boat was slashed so cleverly."

"How far are we from camp, do you think, Dick?"

"As the crow flies it may be five miles, though we came further than that on the river," the other boy replied without any hesitation, showing how completely he kept all these things in his mind, to be utilized on short notice.

"We came down with a swift current," Roger admitted, "and it hardly seemed as if we could have been an hour on the way. It will take us some time to tramp back to camp, even if we take a short-cut to avoid the bends in the river."

"What of that," asked Dick, "since we expected to spend a good part of the day in paddling up the stream, after shooting the rapids? But, if you are dry enough now, I think we had better make a start."

"Suppose we drag the boat into these bushes first, Dick," suggested Roger.

"Not a bad idea either, for some passing Indian might think it worth while to mend the hole and carry the boat off. We would like to have Captain Lewis take a look at that knife mark, so as to prove our story. He trusts all his men, and it is going to make him feel badly to know that one among them has sold himself to an enemy."

Between them they carried the hide canoe in among the bushes, where it was easily hidden away. Of course any one seeking it would readily find its hiding-place; but at least it could not be seen by the ordinary passer-by.

Having accomplished this, the two lads set forth to cover the ground lying between their landing place on the shore of the river, below the rapids, and the camp of the explorers.

They anticipated no trouble in finding their goal, because of their familiarity with woods life. Besides, in their numerous hunting trips during the past winter they had covered nearly all the territory around that region, so that the chances of their getting lost were small indeed.

"We may run across game on the way back, don't you think, Dick?" suggested Roger, just after they had left the ashes of their late fire, which had been dashed with water before they quitted the scene.

"You never can tell," came the reply; "there is always a chance to sight a deer in this country. We got a number, you remember, within three miles of camp while the snow was deep on the ground. And already I have noticed signs telling that they use this section for feeding on the early shoots of grass."

"Yes," added Roger, "tracks there have been in plenty. And as I live! see here, where this tuft of reddish hair has caught on a pointed piece of bark. I warrant you some buck rubbed himself against this tree good and hard. I would like to have been within gunshot of the rascal just then, for the marks are fresh, and I think they were made this very morning."

This gave the two boys hope that they might at any minute run across the deer and bring him down with a lucky shot. As fresh venison was always welcome in the camp, such a possibility as this always spurred them on to do their best. They liked to hear the cheery voice of Captain Lewis telling them frankly that it had been a fortunate thing for the whole expedition when he tempted Dick and Roger to remain and see the enterprise through.

"Listen! what is all that noise ahead of us?" asked Roger, as a sudden burst of snarling and half-suppressed howling was borne to their ears.

"Wolves, as sure as you live!" exclaimed Dick, frowning, for if there was one animal upon which he disliked to waste any of his precious ammunition, that beast was a wolf.

Ordinarily these animals are not to be feared when met singly, or even in pairs; but, during the winter and early spring, they gather in packs, in order to hunt the better for food, and at such times even the boldest hunter dislikes running across them.

"They are certainly on the track of something," suggested Roger, as he listened, and then, shrugging his broad shoulders, he continued. "Like as not, it is that buck we were hoping to run across. A plague on the pests! If I had my way, and could spare the ammunition, I'd shoot every one of the lot!"

"Little good that would do," Dick told him; because they run to thousands upon thousands out on the plains and in the mountains where we are heading. A dozen or two would be no more than a grain of sand on that seashore we hope to set eyes on before snow flies again."

"But listen to them carrying on, Dick," continued the other, with growing excitement. "Come to think of it, I never heard wolves make those queer sounds when chasing a deer. You know they yap like dogs, and almost bark. These beasts are acting like those creatures did when they had me caught up in a tree, with my gun on the ground."

"Yes, I remember the time well enough," chuckled Dick. "You were mighty glad to see a fellow of my heft, too, when I came along. Twenty hours up a tree is no joke, when you've

got a healthy appetite in the bargain. But, just as you say, Roger, there is something queer about the way they are carrying on."

"They're not chasing anything now, that's certain," asserted the other positively; "because the sounds keep coming from the same place all the time. Dick, perhaps the beasts may have some one treed for all we know. They are savage with hunger, and would just as soon make a meal off a hunter, red or white, as off a deer or a wounded buffalo."

"It happens to be right on our way to camp," remarked Dick, tightening his grip on his longbarreled rifle, "so we can find out what's up without going far out of our path."

This, of course, pleased Headstrong Roger, always in readiness for adventure, it mattered little of what nature. He always maintained that he had a long-standing debt against the tribe of lupus on account of that terrible fast mentioned by his cousin, and, although powder and ball were not too plentiful, he seldom failed to take a shot at his four-footed enemies when the chance came to him.

So now he fancied that he would end the prowling of at least one red-tongued woods rover. Certainly he could spare a single charge, and it would give him more satisfaction than almost anything else. You see, Roger had rubbed the old sore when he spoke of that bitter experience in the past, and it smarted again venomously.

As they pushed steadily on, the sounds increased in volume. They could even hear the thud of heavy bodies falling back to the ground after frantic leaps aloft, as though endeavoring to reach some tempting object among the branches of a tree.

Then Roger, who had the keenest eyesight of the pair, muttered:

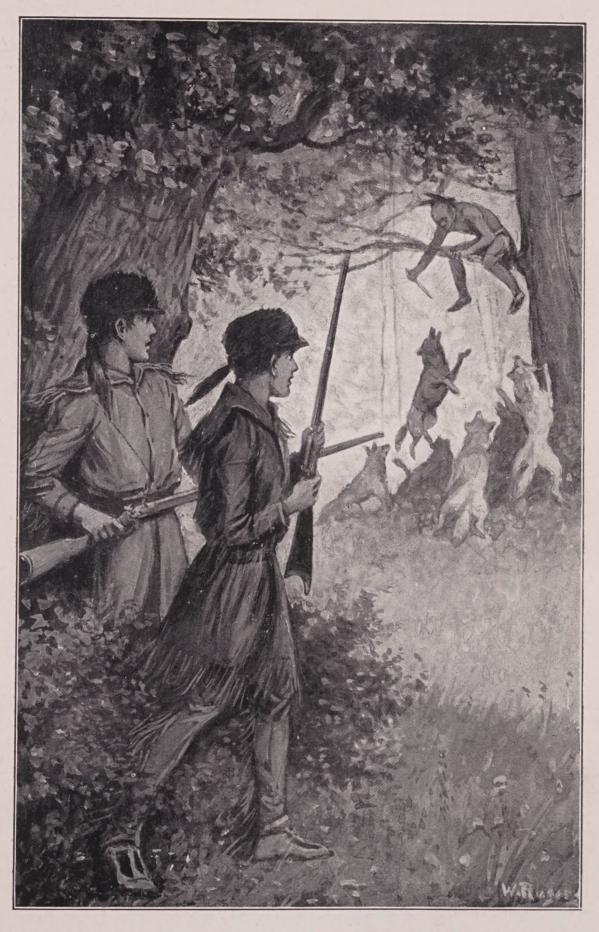
"There, I can just begin to see them through the trees and brush yonder, Dick; and, as we believed, they have some human being treed, or else are trying to force conclusions with a panther, which would be a strange thing, to be sure."

"We'll soon know," the other whispered, "for it's only a little way. Yes, I can see them jumping up, just as you say. Roger, fasten your eyes on the tree above, and tell me what that dark object is."

A minute later, as they still kept pushing forward, Roger uttered a low cry.

"Well, after all, it's an Indian brave up there.

And he's already shot a number of the brutes with his arrows; but I reckon his stock has given out. He tries to strike them as they jump at him, using his knife. And, Dick, I can see now that he isn't a Mandan Indian at all, but more likely one of those Sioux who, under their subchief, Beaver Tail, did us such a good turn last fall, when we saved Jasper Williams from the French traders. But what can a Sioux warrior be doing here, in the land of his foes, the Mandans?"



" 'HE TRIES TO STRIKE THEM AS THEY JUMP AT HIM ""



CHAPTER IV

THE BIRCH BARK MESSAGE

"THERE, I could see him reach down then and strike at a leaping wolf!" exclaimed Dick, showing signs of excitement, something he seldom did, since he had wonderful control over his emotions for a boy of his age.

"Just as I told you," continued Roger, trembling all over with eagerness, "he has used up his arrows, and is trying to cut down the number of his four-footed enemies by other means."

"There, listen to that howl!"

"Oh! he made a splendid strike that time, Dick!"

"Yes, and you can see what that clever brave is up to, if you notice the wild scuffle at the foot of the tree," the other replied.

"Why, the wolves seem to be fighting among themselves, Dick. What makes them act that way, do you know?"

"I can give a guess. These mad animals are almost starving, though just how that should be,

at this season of the year, I am not able to say. The scent of blood makes them wild, you see, and, every time the brave's knife wounds one of the pack, the rest set upon the wretched beast to finish him."

"In that way the Indian could clean them up in time, I should say, without any help from us," Roger suggested, though he showed no sign that his intention of giving aid had changed in the least.

"But they might take warning, and stop jumping up at him," Dick explained; "then his knife would be useless. And, too, other wolves hearing the noise are apt to hasten to the spot, so that there might be an increasing pack, a new one for every beast he helped to kill."

"Dick, he is a brave fellow, even if his skin is red!"

"I agree with you there," said the other, softly.

"Then are we not going to bring about his rescue, even if it does cost us some of our precious powder and shot?" Roger demanded.

"Yes, but I hope it will not be more than one load," replied his cousin; for all their lives this question of a wastage of ammunition had been

impressed on their minds as the utmost folly, and on that account they seldom used their guns except to make sure of worthy game.

"Come, let us rush forward with loud yells, waving our arms, and doing everything we can to scare the animals off before we begin to fire. After we get close up, and they are hesitating what to do, that is the time for us to blaze away."

"A good plan, Roger, and worthy of our fathers' old friend, Pat O'Mara. Only as a last resort will we use our fire-arms."

"And you be the one to say when, Dick, remember!"

"Depend on me for that," Roger was told quickly. "Just as soon as I see that something is needed to force the ugly beasts to make up their minds, I'll call out to you to give it to them."

"Give me one last word of advice before we rush them, Dick."

"Yes, what is it, Roger?"

"If, instead of taking to their heels, the pack turns on us, and starts to fight, what must we do?"

"There isn't one chance in ten it will happen that way," said Dick, "for wolves are too cowardly. When they see us rushing boldly forward you'll notice how every beast's head will droop, and that he'll begin to skulk away, showing his teeth, perhaps, but cowed and whipped."

"But suppose it should?" urged Roger, as they paused, just before bursting out upon the strange scene.

"If it comes to the worst we may have to take to a tree just as the Indian brave has done," Dick told him, "and then start to work killing them off as fast as we can load and fire. Now, are you ready to do a lot of yelling?"

"Just try me, that's all, Dick!"

"Come on, then, with me!"

With the words Dick sprang boldly forth from his concealment, with his cousin alongside. Both of them started to make the woods ring with their strong young voices, and when two healthy boys yell and whoop they can produce a tremendous volume of sound!

Some of those predatory wolves must have conceived the idea that a whole company of the strange two-legged foes was rushing toward them, judging from the hasty manner of their exit from the scene. Others, however, either more bold or hungry, half crouched and, snarl-

ing, showed their white teeth in a vicious manner.

Evidently these leaders of the pack were not as yet quite convinced that the game had gone against them, despite all the noise made by the oncoming boys. On seeing this, Dick and Roger tried to shout louder than ever, while they waved their arms in the most frantic manner.

It devolved upon Dick to decide whether or not they should keep on in this fashion until they came to close quarters with the wolves that lingered, loth to give up their chance of a dinner. Rushing forward at this rate, they would be on the scene in half a dozen seconds, and might find the ugly beasts springing up at their throats.

Never before had the boys seen wolves acting in this manner, for as a rule their nature is cowardly. There was nothing for it but to fall back upon their guns for the finishing stroke, and so Dick gave the word.

"We must shoot, Roger—take that big fellow in front!" he gasped, for he was by this time fairly out of breath after all those strenuous exertions of running, thrashing his arms, and shouting at the top of his voice.

Accordingly both of them halted just long enough to throw their long-barreled rifles to

their shoulders, and glance along the sights. They could actually hear the savage snarls of the defiant pack. Roger, always a bit faster than his companion, was the first to fire, and with the crash of his gun the big leader of the pack sprang upward, only to fall back again with his legs kicking.

Dick's gun spoke fast on the heels of the first report, and he, too, succeeded in knocking over the beast his quick eye had selected.

Then with renewed shouts, Dick and Roger once more started forward, but there was a hasty scurrying of gray bodies, and presently not a wolf remained in sight save the pair that had gone down before the deadly fire of the guns.

The Indian up in the tree dropped to the ground, and the boys saw immediately from his manner of dress that he was, just as Roger had surmised, a Sioux warrior. From the fact that he was bleeding in various places the boys understood that he must have put up a valiant fight at close quarters against his four-footed enemies, before finally seeking refuge among the branches of the friendly tree.

Naturally both lads immediately began to wonder why a Sioux brave should thus venture into the neighborhood of the Mandan village, since the two tribes had been at knives' points for many years. Indeed, the preceding fall, when the boys had been aided by Beaver Tail and some of his Sioux warriors, who accompanied them later to their camp, it had required all the tact and diplomacy of which Captain Lewis was capable to prevent an open rupture between the old-time rivals.

"First we must make him let us look at his wounds," suggested Dick, "because it is no child's play to have the teeth of wolves draw blood. Some of his wounds look bad to me."

"I think you are right, Dick," agreed the other, always accustomed to leaving the decision to his cousin. "See if you can make him understand what we want to do. I'll get some water in my hat, so you can wash the wounds."

The boys always made it a practice to carry certain homely remedies with them, for in those pioneer days the family medicine chest consisted in the main of dried herbs, and lotions made from them, all put up by the wise housewife. Those who lived this simple life, and were most of the time in the open air, seldom found themselves in need of a doctor, and most of their troubles sprang either from accidents, or in-

juries received in combats with wild beasts of the forest.

So it was that they had with them a salve they always used to soothe the pain, as well as neutralize the poison injected by bites or scratches received in struggles at close quarters with carnivorous beasts.

The Indian was looking at them as though puzzled. Whites were rarely seen by the dwellers in these far regions beyond the Mississippi; indeed, most of the natives had never as yet set eyes on a paleface.

This brave, however, may have been in company with Beaver Tail, the friendly chief, at the time he aided the two boys, and, if so, he undoubtedly recognized Dick and Roger.

Unable to speak the Sioux tongue, of which they knew but a few words, it would be necessary for Dick to make use of gestures in conducting a brief conversation with the other. Still, the smile on his face, as well as the fact of his recent acts, would readily tell the red wanderer that he was a friend.

"Ugh!" was all the Indian could say, but he accepted the hand that was extended, though possibly this method of greeting was strange to him. Dick pressed him to sit down, and the brave did so, though with increasing wonder. He speedily realized, however, what the white boys meant to do, and without offering any remonstrance continued silently to watch their labor, as they proceeded to look after his injuries.

Roger fetched his hat full of cool water from a running brook close by, and one by one Dick washed the numerous scratches and ugly furrows where those wolfish fangs had torn the flesh of the stoical brave's lower limbs.

He gave no sign of flinching, though the pain must have been more than a trifle. The boys knew enough of Indian character to feel sure that, if it had been ten times as severe, he would have calmly endured it, otherwise he could not have claimed the right to wear the feather they could see in his scalplock, and which signified that he was a warrior, or brave.

Finally the task was completed. There had been nothing further heard from the remnant of the baffled wolf pack all this while, proving that the loss of their powerful leaders must have taken the last bit of courage from the animals, known never to be very brave.

All the while the Sioux continued to keep those black eyes of his glued on Dick Armstrong. It

was as though he was in search of some one and had made up his mind that, since there could be no other paleface boys within a thousand miles of the spot, these must be the ones he had been commissioned to find.

Just about the time Dick, with another of his rare smiles, indicated that the work of looking after his injuries had been completed, the Sioux fumbled in his snake-skin ditty bag, where he kept his little stock of pemmican, and numerous other necessary articles, perhaps his war paint as well. To the astonishment of the boys he drew out a small roll of birch bark, secured far to the north, and handed it to Dick.

Filled with curiosity, the boy opened it with trembling fingers, to find, just as he had anticipated, that it was covered with a series of queer characters, painted after the Indian fashion and representing men and animals.

"It's Indian picture writing, you see, Roger!"
Dick declared, "and must be meant for us, or else this brave would not give it over. He has been sent here from the far-away Sioux village to find us, and deliver a message."

"Yes," added Roger, excitedly. "And look, Dick, there is what seems to be the awkward but plain picture of a beaver at the end of the mes-

sage. It must have been sent by our good friend, the chief of the Sioux."

"You are right that far, Roger, for it is meant to be the signature of Beaver Tail, himself. Now to see if we can make out what it says!"

CHAPTER V

WHAT THE PICTURE WRITING TOLD

Ir was with the utmost eagerness that the two boys studied the strange characters depicted on the strip of bark. The hand that had drawn them there must have been accustomed to the task, and doubtless the story the message was meant to tell could have been easily read by the eyes of any Indian.

Dick and his cousin had seen samples of this queer picture writing before that time, and understood how the Indians depend on the natural sagacity of a woodsman, whether red or white, to decipher the meaning of the various characters. (Note 3.)

"What can it all stand for?" demanded Roger, as he gazed blankly at the several lines of characters. "Perhaps we may have to call on some of the Mandans in the village to explain it to us."

"We will do that in the end, anyway," Dick said, "in order to make certain; but, if we look this over closely, right now, we may get an idea of what Beaver Tail meant by sending it."

"You don't think then, Dick, it was intended just as a greeting to us, so as to let us know the chief has not forgotten his young paleface brothers?"

"No, I feel sure it has a more serious meaning than that," the other declared. "In fact, Roger, something tells me it may be in the nature of a warning."

"A warning, Dick! Do you mean the Sioux chief wants us to tell Captain Lewis it will be all his life is worth to keep heading into the land of the West, now that spring has come?"

"I was thinking only of ourselves when I said that, Roger."

"And that the warning would be for our benefit, you mean? But, Dick! how could Beaver Tail, so far away from here, know of any danger that hung over our heads?"

"Let us examine the bark message, and perhaps we shall learn something that may explain the mystery. The first thing we see is what looks to be a man facing the sun that is half hidden by the horizon."

"Yes, that hedgehog-looking half circle is meant for the sun, I can see that. And, further along, we find it again, only on the left side of the man who is now creeping toward it. What do you make that out to be?"

"It is plain that one represents the rising, and the other the setting sun," Dick explained, with lines of deep thought marked across his forehead. "Now, an Indian always faces the north when he wants to represent the points of the compass, so it is plain that the first sun lies in the east."

"And he wanted us to know that this man was heading into the east first of all; is that what you mean, Dick?"

"Yes, and look closer at the figure, Roger. It is not intended to be an Indian, you can see, for he has a hat on his head. It strikes me we ought to know that hat, cleverly imitated here; what do you say about it?"

"Oh! it must be the odd-looking hat that French trader, François Lascelles, always wore, Dick. He means that it was toward the rising sun François started last fall, just as we know happened. And now here he is, again, the same hat and all, creeping straight toward the setting sun. Does that mean the trader came back again, in spite of the warning Captain Lewis gave him?"

"I am sure it means that, and nothing else," replied the other, calmly. "Stop and think, Roger. Only a little while ago, we were wondering whether such a thing had come about, because we found reason to believe some member of the expedition had been hired to do us an injury. Yes, that bitter Frenchman has dared to return, believing that he can keep out of the reach of our protectors, and manage in some way to get his revenge."

"If that is what Beaver Tail is trying to tell us in this picture writing, Dick, the rest of the screed must simply go on to explain it a little further."

"You notice that the same figure with the hat occurs always," continued Dick, as he examined the message again. "Here is what must stand for a fire, and two persons are sitting beside it, as if cooking. In what seems to be a clump of bushes close by he has drawn that man again, this time lying flat."

"That must mean that François is spying on the pair by the fire," suggested Roger, "and as he has made both of them wear caps with coon or squirrel tails dangling down behind, I think they are meant to represent us."

"There can be no question about it," admitted

the other, deeply interested. "And, going further, we see the snake in the grass creeping up as if he meant to surprise the two, who are now sleeping, for they lie flat on the ground."

"Yes, even the fire burns low, for there is hardly any blaze," added Roger, "which indicates that the hour is late. Why, Dick, we can read the story as easily as any sign in the woods we ever tackled."

"Then comes another scene," continued Dick, "where the creeper has evidently sprung with uplifted knife, upon his intended prey, taken unawares. After that, we can see him crawling away, and there are two figures lying stretched out on the ground close to the now dead fire. That needs no explanation, Roger; François Lascelles seeks our lives, because we baffled him in his scheme to win a fortune at the expense of our folks at home!"

The two boys looked at each other. Their eyes may have seemed troubled, but there was no sign of flinching about them. The lads had met too many perils in times past to shrink, now that they were face to face with another source of danger.

"Shall we keep on now for the camp, and show

this message on the bark to Captain Lewis?" asked Roger.

"It would be the best thing to do, for he can advise us," his companion admitted. "Besides, he will surely order every one in the camp to keep an eye out for François Lascelles."

"We ought to take this brave with us, Dick, because he has come a long way, and is hardly fit to return without rest and food."

Once again did Dick endeavor to make the Sioux warrior comprehend what he wished him to do. He urged him to get upon his feet, then thrust an arm through that of the brave, after which he nodded his head, pointed to the north, made gestures as though feeding himself, and then started to walk away, still holding on to the other.

Of course it was easy for the Indian to understand that they wished him to accompany them to their camp, where he would receive food and attention. He simply gave a guttural grunt, nodded his head, and fell in behind Dick, after the customary Indian method of traveling in single file. Then they moved along, Roger bringing up the rear.

Little was said while they tramped onward, heading for the camp. Dick occupied himself

with making sure that he held to the right direction. He also found much food for thought in the startling information that Beaver Tail had taken the pains to send all these miles to his young friends.

In due time they came in sight of the camp where the expedition had passed the preceding winter. Rude cabins had sheltered them from the cold and the snow, both of which had been quite severe in this northern latitude. Some distance beyond lay the Mandan village, always a source of deepest interest to the two boys. It contained so many strange things, and the lads had never become weary of trying to understand the ways of these "White Indians." (Note 4.)

Upon seeing the boys come in with a strange Indian in their company, many curious glances were cast in their direction. Going straight to the cabin where the two leaders of the expedition lived, the boys were fortunate enough to find Captain Lewis busily engaged in making up his log for the preceding day, though of course there was little that was new to record.

To the surprise of the boys the Sioux Indian produced another bark scroll from his ditty bag, which he handed to Captain Lewis. This fact convinced Dick that the brave must have been with the party in the fall, for he seemed to know that the white man he faced was the "big chief."

"What does all this mean, my boys?" asked the captain, looking puzzled.

"We met with an accident in the rapids, and had to swim out," replied Dick. "Then, on the way back to camp, we came upon this Sioux brave in a tree with a dozen hungry wolves jumping up at him. We chased the wolves off, and looked after his wounds, when to our surprise he handed us this message from his chief, Beaver Tail."

The captain examined the picture writing with considerable interest. He had been taking considerable pains since mingling with the Mandans to understand their ways, and this crude but effective method of communication had aroused his curiosity on numerous occasions.

"Read it to me, if you managed to make it out, Dick," he told the boy, who only too willingly complied.

The captain frowned upon learning that, despite his solemn warning, the French trader had returned to the neighborhood. That look boded ill for François Lascelles, should he ever have the hard luck to be caught in the vicinity of the camp.

The captain's own communication from the Sioux chief was merely meant for an expression of goodwill. Two figures, one plainly a Sioux chieftain, and the other a soldier, were seen to be grasping hands as though in greeting. Beaver Tail by this crude method of picture writing evidently intended to convey the meaning that he had not forgotten his friend, the white chief, and, also, that he had kept his word that the Sioux should remain on peaceful terms with the travelers.

"But you spoke of meeting with an accident in the rapids," Captain Lewis presently remarked. "That is something strange for clever boys like you to experience. Did you miscalculate the danger, or was it something that could not be helped?"

"We closely examined our buffalo hide canoe yesterday, and it was in perfect condition, Captain," said Dick. "Yet, with only a slight blow against a perfectly smooth rock, it split open, and we had to jump overboard. We managed to get through the rough water safely, and drew the damaged boat ashore. Imagine our surprise and consternation, sir, when we found that a sharp-pointed knife blade had been run along the bottom of the canoe, making a deep cut that

had easily given way when we struck the rock."

"You startle me when you say that, Dick," remarked the captain, looking uneasy, though almost immediately afterward his jaws became set in a determined fashion, while his eyes gleamed angrily. "It must mean that we have a traitor in the camp; some one who has been bought by the gold of François Lascelles."

"That was what we began to fear, Captain," Dick continued, "and we believed it only right to let you know what happened to us. We hope you will send some of the Indians, and one of our men, for the canoe. It could be brought secretly to the camp and examined, without the guilty one knowing about it."

"A good idea, my boy, and one I shall act upon at once. Say nothing to a single soul concerning this outrage. If we expect to catch the traitor napping, he must not be put on his guard. But none of us could feel safe, knowing we had a snake in our midst. Depend upon it, the truth is bound to come out, and, when once we learn his identity, the traitor will be kicked out of the camp, if nothing worse happens to him."

With this assurance the two boys rested content. They knew Captain Lewis was a man of his word, and felt sure that the man who had

sold his loyalty for a sum of money offered by the French trader would before long rue the evil day he allowed himself to be thus tempted.

Soon afterward they saw Captain Clark and his companion officer in conference, after which the former went over to the Mandan village, and, later on, vanished in the dense forest accompanied by two stalwart braves. They had gone, the boys knew to secure the hide canoe that told the story of treachery in the camp.

CHAPTER VI

STALKING THE BUFFALO

On the following day orders were given to prepare to start once more in the direction of the beckoning West. There was not much to be done, for, knowing that their departure would soon be ordered, the men had for some time past been getting things in readiness.

Dick and Roger had looked their few possessions over, and were ready to move on short notice. It gave the boys a little feeling of distress to realize that they would be thus placing additional ground between themselves and those dear ones left at home near the mouth of the Missouri.

"But we have embarked on the trip," said Dick, when his chum was speaking of this as something he did not like very much, "and must see it through now. When we do get back home again, if we are so fortunate, think of all the wonderful things we shall be able to describe."

The coming of Captain Lewis just then inter-

rupted their confidential talk. Dick expected that their leader had something of importance to communicate, and he could give a pretty accurate guess concerning its nature.

Sure enough, the first words spoken by the President's private secretary explained the nature of his visit to the cabin of the Armstrong boys.

"I had an opportunity to examine your canoe, and there can be no reason to doubt that some unknown miscreant planned to have you lose your lives in the rapids. It was cleverly done, and at night-time doubtless, when no one would be apt to notice him working with your boat. The knife went in just deep enough to weaken the whole skin of the bottom, and only a slight blow was needed to finish the treacherous work."

"Of course you have not been able to place your hand on the guilty party, Captain, have you?" asked Roger, eagerly.

"Nothing has been found out so far," came the reply. "One of my reasons for joining you just now is to ask if either of you have any suspicions. Although of course we could not accuse any one on such grounds alone, at the same time it might narrow our search, and focus attention on the guilty one, so that he could be watched, and caught in the act."

"We do not feel able to say positively, Captain Lewis," said Dick, "but when we came to look over the entire membership of the company we finally figured it out that it must lie between three men. All the others seemed to be above suspicion in our eyes."

"Tell me who they are, so that I can have them watched," demanded the commander.

"There is, first of all, Drewyer, the Canadian scout. He never seemed to be very friendly with us, for some reason or other, though we have had no quarrel. You are surprised to hear me mention his name, because you have always trusted him fully. And the chances are, Captain, that Drewyer is as faithful as the needle to the pole. I only include him because we know so little about him."

"Who is the next one you have on your list?" asked Captain Lewis. "I count considerably on your natural sagacity to help in running this traitor to earth. You boys have learned pretty well how to judge men from their actions and looks, rather than from their fair speech. Tell me the other names, please, Dick."

"Fields is the second man. I base my right

to include him in the group from the fact that there was a time when my cousin, here, and Fields had hot words over something the trapper had been doing in the village, and which Roger took him to task for. Since that time they have been on speaking terms, but I do not think Fields likes us over much."

"I should regret very much to learn that Fields had turned traitor, for I have in the past been ready to trust him to any extent," remarked Captain Lewis.

"The third and last man is Andrew Waller," continued Dick. "Now, we have never had a word with Andrew except in the best of ways. We have always looked on him as a loyal friend, and faithful to the trust you put in him. It has only been of late that both of us noticed that Andrew seems to try to avoid us, and when we do meet face to face he lets his eyes drop."

"That is indeed a suspicious fact," commented the other, quickly. "If money has tempted him to play the part of a traitor it is easy to understand how he cannot look you squarely in the eye. Conscience flays him every time he sees you near by. I shall certainly bear in mind what you have told me, and in due time

results may spring from keeping a close watch on the movements of these three men."

With that Captain Lewis left the boys, but they felt sure he would not allow the matter to drop. The man whom President Jefferson had personally selected to manage this big enterprise, and who had been his own private secretary, was accustomed to getting results whenever he attempted anything.

It was on the following morning that camp was broken, and the expedition once more started forward—down the Yellowstone to the Missouri, and up that muddy stream again. That was an event of vast importance in the lives of those daring souls who were thus venturing to plunge deeper into the mysteries of the country that up to then had never known the imprint of a white man's foot.

Although filled with exultation, as were the rest of the travelers, Dick and his cousin looked back to see the last of the weird Mandan village which had long been a source of delight to their eyes. It was with considerable regret that they took their farewell view of the painted lodges, as well as the Indian cemetery on the side of the hill, where all those platforms, bearing their mummy-like burdens wrapped in buffalo hides,

told of superstitions that were a part of the Mandan nature.

During that day they made considerable progress, and the first camp of the new trail was pitched on a ridge close to the river. Here the horses were put out to graze, and the boats drawn up on the shore, though a guard was constantly kept to insure against treachery.

Despite the apparent friendship shown by many of the Indian tribes they encountered on their long journey of thousands of miles, the two captains never fully put their trust in the red men. They believed them as a rule to be treacherous, and unable to resist pilfering if the opportunity offered. Especially was this true when the coveted object was a horse or a "stick that spat fire," as the wonderful "shooting-irons" of the explorers were generally called.

Several days passed with nothing to break the monotony of the journey. Of course they often met with minor difficulties, but these were speedily overcome by a display of that general-ship which had so far made the trip a success.

All this while the boys had not forgotten about the spy in the camp. Without appearing to do so, they kept a watch upon the three men upon whom suspicion had fallen. Had any one of them offered to leave camp after nightfall, he would have been trailed by Dick and Roger, bent on learning what could be the object of his wandering, and whether he had an appointment with François Lascelles, the Indian trader.

But, as the days drifted along, and nothing happened, they began to cherish hopes that perhaps the accident to their canoe had been rather an act of vandalism and malice than part of a deep plan to bring about their death.

A week after leaving the winter camp the party found itself on the border of a wide plain. Dick and Roger were mounted and were on a slight elevation down which they expected to pass to the level ground near the river, and await the coming of the boats. From here they could see for a considerable distance around.

"Look at the herds of buffaloes feeding here and there, Dick!" exclaimed Roger, whose hunting instincts were easily aroused. "It strikes me we heard Captain Clark say the fresh meat was getting low again. What do you say to trying to knock over one or two of those fine fellows?"

"We would have to go a considerable distance to do it, then," the other told him, "and leave our horses in the bargain, because they are not used to approaching such fierce-looking animals as buffalo bulls."

"But we might be lucky enough to get one or two yearlings," persisted Roger, who dearly loved the excitement of the hunt, as well as the taste of the well-cooked meat when meal time came. "I think we could manage to load our animals down with the spoils, and easily reach the place where our friends mean to camp for the night."

Dick looked around him before replying to this tempting proposal. He remembered that they had need to use particular care while away from the main body of explorers; but so far as indications went he could not discover the slightest sign of danger. Certainly there was nothing to be feared from François Lascelles out there on that wide stretch of plains, where in various places they could see timid antelopes and clumsy buffaloes feeding amidst the isolated stands of timber which dotted the landscape.

"I see nothing to hinder our making the attempt, Roger," he finally remarked.

"Then you agree, do you, Dick?" eagerly demanded the other young explorer, as he caressed his gun, and cast a happy look over the panorama that was spread in front of them.

"Let's figure out just where our best chance lies, before we make a start," he was told. "We have to keep in mind that it's necessary to hide our mounts, so we can creep up on the herd close to some motte of timber."

The boys had more than once shot the great, shaggy animals that in those early days abounded in countless thousands on the prairies of the Far West. Their fathers had hunted buffaloes while on the trail from Virginia to the banks of the Ohio when boys no older than Dick and Roger. Hence they were familiar with the habits of the animals which they now meant to stalk.

Choosing their course so as to keep a patch of cottonwoods between themselves and the small herd they had picked out as their prey, the two boys urged their horses on at a smart pace. In several quarters they could see the swift-footed antelopes vanishing at a surprising pace, frightened by the approach of these strange animals, bearing riders on their backs, the like of which they possibly had never beheld before that day.

The buffaloes, however, were not so easily alarmed. Unless they saw an enemy for themselves, or scented something that caused them

uneasiness, they were likely to hold their ground where they chanced to be feeding. (Note 5.)

Finally the boys decided it was no longer safe to take their horses with them. The animals were accordingly secured in a patch of timber, and the lads, still screened by the other motte, set forth on foot.

They had possibly a quarter of a mile to walk before reaching their intended shelter, from the other side of which they hoped to be able to fire upon some of the nearest of the herd. The old grass still lay on the ground, dead and brown; but shoots of the new spring crop had begun to thrust their heads up between. It was on this tender green stuff that the buffaloes were browsing, and, as it grew more freely in certain places, such a fact would account for their presence near the timber.

The one thing Dick and Roger had to be careful about was the chance of any straggler from the herd discovering them, and with a bellow giving the alarm. In order to avoid this if possible, Dick and his chum bent low as they advanced, and kept a wary lookout on either side of the timber.

The breeze blew from the trees toward them. This fact they had made sure of before starting, because, otherwise, such is the sense of smell in the buffaloes they would not have had the least chance of getting within shooting distance of the wary animals, who generally feed facing the wind.

When finally the boys arrived at the edge of the timber they believed everything was working as well as they could wish. As yet no sound had come to their ears that would indicate alarm on the part of their intended quarry; and Roger allowed himself to indulge in high hopes of a hunters' feast that night, with buffalo meat in plenty as the main dish.

CHAPTER VII

HUNTERS, ALL

"Look, Dick, we are not the only hunters," whispered Roger, as he tugged at the sleeve of his cousin's tunic, and pointed with his rifle.

There was a slight movement in the undergrowth just ahead of them. Dick, looking in that direction, was surprised to see a crouching animal slink away. He instantly recognized it as a gray timber wolf, and knew the animal must have been hiding there in hopes of seizing upon some sort of game.

As a single wolf, however daring, would never attempt to attack a buffalo, Dick could not understand at first what the animal meant to do. He judged, however, that, as this was the spring of the year, possibly there were calves in the herd, which would be just the tender sort of food that the sleek prowler would delight to secure.

The animal drew back his lips at the boys, disclosing the cruel white fangs; but he knew better than to attack such enemies and slunk swiftly away. After he slid into a thicker part of the brush the boys lost sight of him, for the time at least.

Bent upon finding a place where they could get a fair shot at such animals as seemed best suited to their needs, the boys crept along. The patch of timber was not of any great size, and already they could see the open prairie between the standing trees.

Again did the keen-eyed Roger make a sudden discovery that caused him to grip once more the arm of his companion and point. This time, however, he did not speak even in a whisper, for they were very close to the edge of the motte, and for all they knew some buffalo might be lying within twenty feet of them.

What Dick saw, as he turned his eyes in the direction indicated, surprised him very much. Apparently the tempting bait had drawn another savage hunter to the spot in hopes of securing a meal.

It was no Indian brave who sprawled upon the lowermost limb of that tree, but the lithe figure of a gray animal which Dick instantly recognized as a panther, and an unusually big one at that.

The beast was staring hard at them. It did not move, or offer to attack them, but, just as the wolf had done, it bared its teeth.

The boys were not looking for trouble with a brute of this type just then. Food alone held their thoughts and governed their movements. On that account Dick did a very wise thing when, drawing his companion aside, he made a little detour.

The boys crept as softly as though born spies. Hardly a leaf fluttered as they moved along, and certainly no stick cracked under their weight, for these lads had long ago learned all that woodcraft could teach them.

Both cast many a curious glance to the right and to the left, as though wondering what next they would come upon in the way of hungry, envious beasts.

After a little while Dick turned again toward the front, and began to make his way to the edge of the timber. He had noticed that, at a certain point, the dead grass extended some thirty feet away from the trees, and offered splendid shelter to any one who knew how to utilize it.

Taking an observation after he had crawled forward to the very edge of the timber, Dick found that the nearest animals were some little distance away. He could count a dozen of them in sight, and there were two small calves frisking about their mothers.

Although the grass might be exceptionally fine close up to the trees, the temptation to feed in closer was resisted by the buffaloes. They seemed to know by some intuition that danger was apt to lurk where timber grew, especially for the tender calves.

In order to make sure of their shots, it was desirable for the boys to crawl out amidst that dead grass. Dick could see that it offered the finest kind of shelter, and, once they reached its furthermost limit, the chances of making sure shots would be just that much enhanced.

Flattening themselves out upon the ground they crept along on their hands and knees. An inexperienced hunter could never have performed the task without attracting the attention of the feeding buffaloes, and causing a stampede; but the Armstrong boys had learned how to accomplish the feat.

Now and then a cautious observation was taken, and these glances painted the scene vividly on the minds of the creeping boys. They could see the coveted yearling cows that it was their object to secure, the other, older mem-

bers of the herds, and, towering above all, the old bull who ruled the herd.

This last was a terrible object, with the shaggiest mane the boys had ever seen on a buffalo. He showed the scars of numerous fierce battles, and one of his short black horns had been twisted out of shape in some former combat, so that it gave him a peculiarly wicked appearance.

Of course, when picking out their game, neither of the hunters had the slightest idea of aiming for the patriarch of the herd. He would be much too tough a morsel for any one to chew, unless reduced to the point of actual starvation, when he might be preferable to slicing up one's moccasins for soup.

The old fellow seemed to understand his business as acknowledged guardian of the herd. He moved hither and thither, and, every once in so often, stopped to look around him, as though in search of signs of trouble.

Then he would shake his great head, give a proud snort of conscious power, strike at the ground several times with one of his forefeet, and finally go on with his feeding.

By this time the hunters had arrived at the point where to proceed further would be to accept unnecessary risk of detection. They knew well that, once the alarm was given, the whole herd would quickly be in motion.

While they might possibly succeed in a shot taken at a moving target, the chances of a miss were much greater than they cared to take. So Dick concluded the time had come for them to pick out their quarry, take deliberate aim, and then fire as close together as possible.

A moving form attracted their attention close to the trees. It was the hungry wolf, possibly seeking some new shelter. If the feeding animals noticed the gray form at all they paid little heed to his presence, having contempt for a single wolf. It would have been at the risk of his life for the wolf to make a dash out toward the herd. Hungry though he probably was, the slinking beast must have known this, for, after giving a stretch to his head, as though longingly sniffing the air, he crept once more back into the shelter of the timber.

Roger chuckled to himself, though deep down in his boyish heart he felt sorry for that hungertempted wolf. He was also thinking that, if their plans turned out well, they would leave a feast behind sufficient to satisfy the appetites of both panther and wolf.

One last survey Dick took of the open stretch

before them. He noticed that the old bull was sniffing the air suspiciously just then. Whether he had caught traces of their presence, or it was the fact of the prowling wolf that began to bother the bull, Dick could not say.

In fact, things had by now reached a stage where he did not think it mattered. Directly before them, and in plain sight, were two of the yearlings, one of them a fine, sturdy-looking young bull.

Dick, as soon as he clapped his eye on this animal, selected him as his intended victim. He knew that such a prize would be a choice morsel for the camp; and, for that reason, he meant that his aim should be particularly sure when the moment arrived to shoot.

- "Leave the young bull to me, Roger," he whispered under his breath.
- "Just as you say, Dick," came the equally cautious reply, as both rifles were brought slowly up to the boys' shoulders.

The leader of the herd stamped his forefoot angrily on the ground and made the turf fly. Plainly his suspicions had been aroused.

Dick knew they must delay no longer. The bull acted as though about to give the alarm that would cause the whole herd to scamper wildly off. Now the guns were leveled, and the cheek of each hunter lay alongside the stock.

"Ready?" asked Dick, softly.

"Yes," came the immediate reply.

"Then let go!"

Crash!

Both guns let go almost as one, and the feeding herd was thrown into a wild panic.

CHAPTER VIII

CHARGED BY A BULL

THE first thing the boys noticed was the fact that two of the great beasts had gone down in answer to their shots. The camp was likely to have an abundance of fresh meat that night at least.

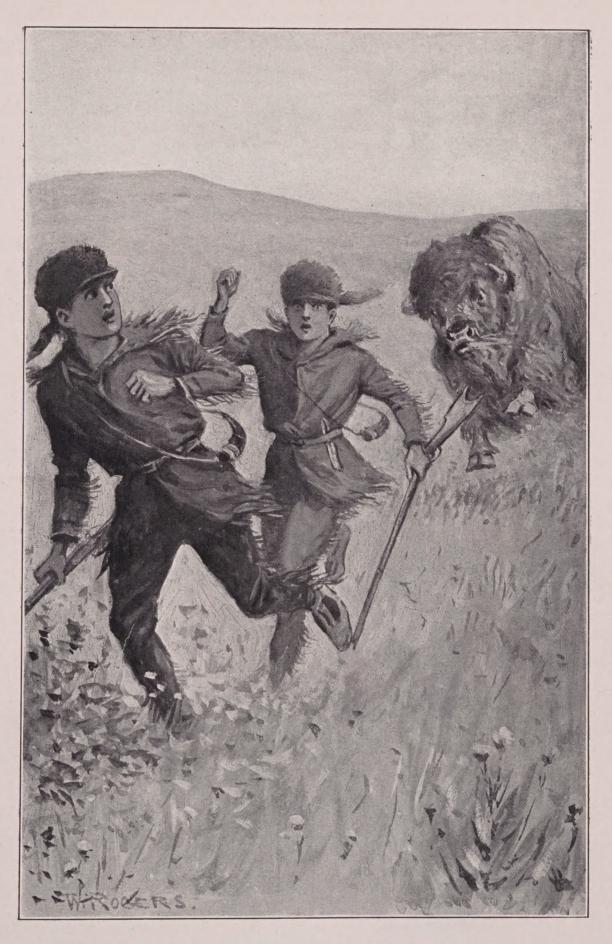
Then another thing drew their attention.

"Look at the bull!" cried Roger suddenly, as he noticed that the guardian of the herd was plunging in their direction as though bent on seeking a prompt revenge for the loss of his charges.

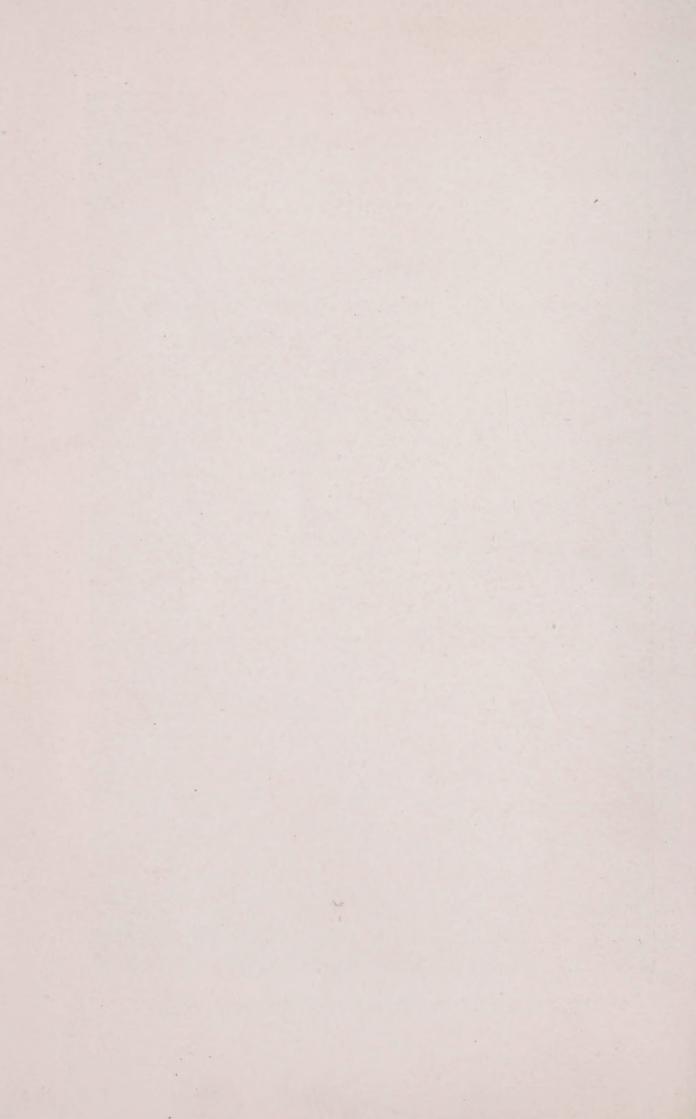
The predicament of the boys was not at all to their liking. Without a bullet in their guns, and with a maddened bull bearing down upon them at full speed, unless they made a rapid retreat to the timber they were in danger of being gored and trampled by the horns and hoofs of the beast.

"Run for the trees, Roger!" shouted Dick, as he himself turned and made for the timber.

Fortunately they were not far from shelter.



" RUN FOR THE TREES, ROGER! 'SHOUTED DICK "



Roger had before been inclined to lament the fact that the mass of dead grass did not allow them to creep closer to the game, but he changed his mind now, when every yard counted against them.

Once Roger caught his foot somehow, and fell flat. Dick seemed to know it, although his back was turned to his chum at the time, for he instantly stopped in his headlong rush and whirled around. It was his intention to stand by his comrade, come what would, to divert, if necessary, the attention of the charging animal until such time as Roger could gain his feet.

It turned out that the sacrifice was not needed, for, nimble as a cat, Roger gained his feet like a flash, and, putting on a fresh spurt, succeeded in reaching the outermost trees as soon as Dick.

They were none too soon. The galloping buffalo was close at their heels. Had the friendly timber been ten paces further off there might have been a different story to tell.

Each boy chose a tree behind which he tried to shield himself. The bull rushed past, but immediately came to a halt, turned and started to chase Roger around the tree which he had taken for a guard. "Faster, Roger, faster!" called Dick, alarmed lest the animal overtake the boy.

This shout caused the bull to take notice of his other enemy, and he plunged directly toward Dick, who was compelled to make circles around his shelter at a lively pace, in order to keep from being impaled on those wicked-looking short black horns.

Having the inside track the boy of course was given an advantage, but it seemed as though that tough old monster would never tire. He kept on circling the tree, making savage prods at the legs of his intended quarry whenever Dick lagged a little, or, slipping, fell back a step or so.

Roger started just then to give tongue at the top of his voice, thinking that it was not altogether fair to have the game so one-sided. His generous intention was to attract the animal once more toward himself; and in this he fully succeeded.

Now it was Roger who danced a tune that was far from being a stately minuet. Lively boy that he was, that old rascal of a buffalo bull put him to his best paces in order to keep out of danger.

Roger was hard to subdue even at such a time

as this. It would have seemed to be the part of wisdom to conserve every atom of his breath for the work before him, yet he was continually bursting out with shouts to his comrade.

"Did you ever see anything so mad as he is, Dick?" he called.

"Be careful, Roger; he almost got you that time, when he drove his head against the tree. It may seem like a frolic to you, but the danger is there all the same!"

"It's the greatest race I ever had, barring none!" gasped the other, as he continued to dodge the horns that were forever trying to catch him off his guard.

"Better throw your gun away, for it's likely to trip you!" advised Dick; and hardly had the words escaped his lips than there came another sudden change of tactics on the part of the charging bull, with Dick again doing the dodging.

Roger took this occasion to change his tree, selecting one that offered a little better chance for making a speedy circuit, for of course he anticipated soon coaxing the infuriated animal to turn back on him.

There had been another reason for his change of base which was made apparent a little later on. Dick was making splendid time around that trunk. He also managed to keep a close watch upon his shaggy antagonist, and was thus able to anticipate the latter when, with a sudden stop and a whirl the bull sought to catch him napping and come up in the rear.

"Dick, I've got a plan!" cried Roger.

"Tell me what it is then," panted the other, plainly distressed for want of breath, for the constant struggle to avoid the horns of the bull was telling on him.

"I must get him started after me again, you see," Roger commenced to explain.

"Yes, of course!" Dick managed to say as he found a few seconds of relief while the animal stood pawing the ground, and apparently debating within his mind what course he should take next.

"I'm a little the more agile, you see," continued Roger, "and likely to tire him out in the end, if put to it."

"All very well," Dick told him, "but where do I come in?"

"Oh! I figured on your loading your gun, and fixing him in a hurry!" said Roger, with a laugh.

Dick even joined in that expression of merri-

ment. Strange that up to then neither of them seemed to have given the first thought to the fact that he gripped a fire-arm in his hand, which it would take only a short time to put in serviceable condition.

"Well said, Roger! and, if you can coax the old fellow to make a change in his program, I'll look after the gun part of the affair, I promise you."

"Look out, he's after you again, Dick!"

Dick knew that long before Roger could get the words of warning framed, and he was speedily making his rapid circuits around the tree with the snorting animal hot on his heels.

With the intention of carrying out his part of the arrangement Roger now started to shout and make all manner of derisive gestures by which he hoped to attract the attention, and excite the ire, of the raging animal.

It was some time before this maneuver met with the success Roger hoped for, but in the end he managed to coax the bull into making a dash toward his tree. Thereupon Roger exerted himself to keep the animal busy, so that Dick should not be interrupted in his task.

In order to do this the better he kept up his jeering cries, and, when he found the chance,

even made thrusts at the beast with his long gun, once striking him smartly on the head.

The pace was beginning to tell on the buffalo. His powers of endurance had diminished since that eventful day when in mortal combat he had slain the old guardian of the herd, and usurped his position of trust.

Meanwhile Dick was far from being idle.

He had, as soon as the attention of the bull was diverted, swung his powder horn around, after removing the wooden stopper, and carefully measured out a charge. This he managed to pour down the barrel of his rifle, after which, from the cavity in the stock of the weapon, he took a greased patch in which the bullet was to be enclosed. After that the ramrod was used to punch the bullet down into the interior of the long barrel until it finally lodged snugly upon the powder charge.

Nothing remained but the priming, which was a brief matter at the most; and Dick was gladdened by the thought that now he held in his hand the means for terminating that ridiculous dance which the old bull was leading Roger.

A tree interfered somewhat with his view, and Dick ran a little closer, in order to make certain of his aim. Dropping on one knee after the fashion of expert marksmen of the day, he waited until there came a little lull in the mad chase.

"Now you can get him, Dick!" called Roger, between his gasps for breath, as the bull stopped short to strike again his hoof violently against the ground.

It was the opening the pioneer boy had been waiting for, and immediately the long gun shot out a puff of smoke as the report sounded. The buffalo had been hit in a vital spot, for he fell to the ground without even one jump.

Roger started to give a triumphant shout, when he cut it short, for something had leaped through the air; and, upon looking at the still-quivering body of the stricken bull, what was the boy's surprise to see a crouching figure fastened upon it, and to hear the vicious snarl of the savage panther as, with ears pressed back against his head, he glared defiantly at the young hunter.

CHAPTER IX

PLANNING A SURPRISE

"More trouble ahead!" cried Roger, starting back, for he did not fancy a hand-to-hand conflict with that furious beast, intent on claiming the game that had fallen to Dick's gun.

"Do nothing rash!" admonished the other, who knew the headstrong ways of his cousin, and wished to prevent any action that might precipitate a struggle.

"But see how the beast acts! As if he owned the earth, Dick!"

"Well, what of it?" came the steady reply, for Dick was hastening his reloading operations while talking, something Roger did not seem to have thought of.

"But you shot the bull, Dick," urged the other.

"Then I make of him a present to our friend, the big cat," Dick told him. "We have quite enough meat out on the open, all we can manage. Besides, I pity your teeth if you ever try to bite into the flesh of that tough old rascal. Move around, and let the cat be. That's all he asks of us."

"But, Dick, I don't like to let it seem as though the two of us were afraid of just a hungry panther," remonstrated Roger, who was proud of his valor.

"Oh! for that matter, there's the poor old wolf, you remember. And in a short time the air will be black with buzzards coming to the feast from a distance of miles around. Let good enough alone, as I've heard your mother tell you, many's the time."

Grumbling a little, and sending more than one aggressive look backward toward the audacious panther, Roger finally agreed to accompany his chum out to where the other victims lay.

The rest of the herd had galloped away, and were far distant by this time, though now lacking a gallant protector. And, lying where they had fallen, were the yearling bull and another, for both boys had made capital shots.

- "What shall we do first?" asked Roger.
- "I want to see you charge that rifle of yours before we start a single thing," he was told bluntly by his companion.
 - "Oh! I had forgotten that part of the game,

but you know I generally do reload without any loss of time, Dick. I learned that long years ago, and many a time, as I can distinctly remember, it saved me a heap of trouble."

This duty having been accomplished, Roger waited to hear what they were to attempt next; for as a rule he was content to let Dick do the planning.

"While you go and fetch the horses, Roger, I'll start to cutting up this fine young bull. You've got your bearings, of course, and know just where we left our mounts?"

"I surely do know," the other replied, "and I'll have them here before long. If I were you, Dick, I'd keep one eye out for that slippery beast of a panther. For all any one can say, he may take a notion that he prefers tender meat to tough. And that I'd call carrying the joke too far."

"Depend on it, Roger, I'll keep my gun handy all the while, and, if Mr. Panther gives me any trouble, I'll be tempted to waste a bullet on him. Get back as soon as you can, that's all."

With that advice ringing in his ears Roger hurried off, while Dick, drawing his hunting knife with the buckhorn handle, proceeded to first remove most of the skin of the young bull, so that it could be used to wrap around the meat. After this he started to cut away such choice portions as he meant to keep.

Every now and then as was his habit, he raised his head to take a quick glance around; but neither the panther nor the wolf came into sight. Evidently the hungry animals were not excessively particular about the tenderness of their meat, if only the supply proved sufficient.

Roger came galloping up after a bit, leading the second horse. The animal did considerable snorting, as horses always will when they scent freshly spilled blood; but Roger knew how to stake them out so that they could not wander away.

After that he commenced dressing the second buffalo, also a yearling. Since both boys had had considerable experience in this, they made fair work, and the two piles of fresh meat mounted up by degrees.

It was just as well, for evening was not far away now, the day having drawn on toward its close. Off yonder, in the glowing west, the sun was sinking, and beginning to paint the fleecy white clouds a vivid red that had strange fluted columns running up and down. To the imagination of the two boys these were the beckoning

fingers that tempted them always, just as the rainbow for ages past has promised a pot of gold to him who could find the spot where its foot rested on the earth.

The two bundles of meat were tied securely, and fastened to the backs of the prancing horses. Then the boys set off, expecting to strike the camp of the expedition along the bank of the river.

As they passed the timber they could see something of a commotion in the place where they had had their adventure with the savage old buffalo bull. Dozens of big bald-headed birds were sitting on dead limbs of the trees, now dropping awkwardly down to the ground, and anon flapping back to their perches.

"The buzzards came, just as I thought they would," remarked Dick; "but they'll have to wait for the second table, because that cat and the wolf must first be served. When they can hold no more they may go away and let the poor buzzards have a chance."

Dick did not have any particular trouble in finding his bearings. It had been indelibly impressed on his mind that the river lay to the north, and, with the setting sun on their left, it would be no difficult task to find the water.

He had also figured out about where the boats and the horses would bring up when the day's toll had been taken, so that he was now making what he would have called a bee-line for that particular place.

The sun was down behind the level horizon at last, and shadows had begun to creep out of their hiding-places. Roger began to feel a little anxiety concerning their hoped-for arrival at the river.

"It seems to be further than I thought," he ventured to say presently.

"Meaning the river, I suppose," remarked Dick, calmly. "Yes, I expected that it would take us some little time to get there, because there was a big bend just at the place we left the water, on sighting that hill which we climbed to look around for game."

"Dick, I believe I see something that flickers ahead of us!" exclaimed Roger just then.

"It must be the light of the fires, which as usual have been built below the river-bank, so that their glow may not betray the camp to hostile eyes. Yes, just as you say, Roger, we are getting there, and will be in on time."

"Oh! as to that, Dick," said the other with a laugh, "even if supper is started they will be

sure to switch off and give this fresh buffalo meat the first showing. But, for one, I shall be glad to rest. After all that prancing around my tree every muscle in my legs cries out in pain, I do believe."

They were not long in arriving at the camp, and, when the campers found what the packages that the horses carried contained, they greeted the newcomers with cheery words of welcome and of thanks.

It was a lively scene, with the boats drawn up on the sandy beach under the river-bank; the horses picketed out to graze; the tents that had been erected to serve as sleeping quarters for the company; and the blazing fires about which the cooks were starting to cook the evening meal. For a background to the picture there was the ever-murmuring river, and the boys, many a time, wished they were able to send a loving message down those hundreds of miles to the little settlement of St. Louis, where their loved ones dwelt.

They knew that a monumental task still lay before them, since the terrible, rocky mountains, of which they had heard vague stories from the Indians, had to be scaled, as well as trackless wastes of desert land crossed, before they could hope to feast their eyes on the blue sea which was their goal.

Still, the whole summer lay before them, and they had already surmounted so many obstacles that nothing seemed to daunt those bold spirits. Each day's journey they counted another link in the chain, and, having virtually burned their bridges behind them, it became a necessity that they succeed.

The supper was finally cooked, and those who were not on duty as guards settled down to enjoy what had been prepared. As usual Dick and Roger found places close together, for they were chums in everything, and liked to chat while eating.

"This pays me for all my trouble with that old bull," remarked Roger as he munched away. "Sweeter meat I never tasted, if I do say it myself."

"Oh! I agree with you there," Dick told him.
"But I find myself wondering why Captain
Lewis keeps looking over this way so often.
And then, too, it strikes me he is unusually solemn to-night. What do you say, Roger?"

"I hadn't noticed it before," came the reply presently, "but, now that you call my attention to the fact, I really believe you are right. He does look as if something had gone wrong. I wonder what could have happened while we were away this afternoon."

"We may have to take it out in guessing," Dick observed, "unless the Captain decides to tell us about it, which is hardly likely. But the rest of the men seem to be noisier and in better humor than usual. There's Andrew Waller keeping a lot of them roaring with laughter as he tells some comical story. I never saw him so lively, come to think of it."

About the time all of them were through eating, Dick discovered that Captain Meriwether Lewis was walking directly toward the spot where he and his chum still sat. A couple of convenient stones had afforded them resting places; but, as the commander of the expedition paused beside them, both lads immediately sprang to their feet, courteously offering the captain a seat.

"I will accept if one of you can sit tailor-fashion on the ground," remarked Captain Lewis, but without any sign of merriment in his voice, for he was still looking very grave. "I want to speak with both of you lads, and it is concerning a subject in which you are deeply interested."

Of course that aroused their curiosity at once,

and Roger lost no time in dropping upon the sand, where he could make himself fairly comfortable.

As soon as they were all seated again the captain began:

"While you two boys were away on your hunt this afternoon, something happened which deepened my suspicion that we have a traitor among us. By a mere accident I picked up a bit of paper that some one must have drawn from his pocket unknown to himself. Glancing idly at it I was startled at what I read."

He looked around him as though to make certain that no eye watched his action, and then placed a small piece of paper, very much wrinkled and soiled, in Dick's hand. Together the boys fastened their eyes on the writing and made out the fragment of a sentence:

"if you think it unsafe to stay longer in the camp, join us; but be sure and bring plenty of guns and ammunition along, for we need them."

There was no signature, but the boys did not doubt in the least that the one whose hand had penned this note of instructions was François Lascelles or his equally rascally son, Alexis.

The question was, who could the recipient be, and how were they to find out.

"After you found this paper, Captain, you watched to see if any one seemed to be searching for anything, I suppose?" Dick asked eagerly.

"All the afternoon I have kept on the alert, but, whoever the villain is, he has either not discovered his loss, or else has assumed an appearance of indifference in order to blind hostile eyes."

"But how do you suppose he could have received the message?" continued Dick.

"That, too, may always remain a mystery," continued the other, reflectively, "but an arrangement could have been made whereby certain stones that were laid down in a peculiar manner would direct him to search in a hollow stump or under a log for a letter. All we know is that this traitor did receive his message, and started to tear it to pieces, but on second thought kept part of the letter."

"It will be his undoing yet, sir, I think," Roger ventured to suggest. "Too bad there was no name mentioned, so we could charge him with the deed, and punish him as he deserves. I am wild to know who he is, for I shall long re-

member how he tried to put an end to us in the rapids of the Yellowstone."

"Perhaps you may, and that before another dawn comes," remarked the captain, as he smiled indulgently at the headstrong boy, whom he had come to like very much, as, indeed, he did Dick, also.

"That sounds as though you had made a plan of campaign, Captain," Dick observed, with a pleased look that was only exceeded by the smile on the face of his companion.

"I have laid out a little scheme which I think may work well, and trap the guilty wretch in the toils," explained the captain. "You remember the special mention made of guns and ammunition, which he was told to take with him, if he really believed his usefulness in the camp had come to an end? That gave me my clew."

"The bait will be a stock of powder and ball, and perhaps several guns, unless I fail to catch your meaning, sir?" Dick continued.

"Before we go to sleep, to-night, I shall have three men, whose names I need not mention, know that there are several good guns, and quite a quantity of ammunition for them, in the supply tent where we keep our extra provisions. It is not guarded beyond the fact that sentries are posted outside the camp to watch for enemies. But to-night both of you boys, together with myself and Captain Clark, will be in hiding, ready to capture any one who ventures to enter that supply tent."

"Thank you for thinking of us, sir," exclaimed Roger, warmly.

"Why should I not do so, when the first intimation I received that there was a traitor in the camp came through you two boys? And, besides, you are more deeply interested in his capture and punishment than any of the others, because this unknown spy is working hand and glove with François Lascelles, who hates you most bitterly."

"Tell us what to do, Captain, and you can rely on our working with you to the best of our ability," Dick assured the commander, who smiled at him and went on to explain further.

"Understand then, that, later on, both of you, when not observed, are to take your guns and disappear. I will look to find you in that bunch of brush yonder to the right, and from that point we can watch the supply tent until something happens. I think the bait will be sufficiently attractive to tempt the man to make his move, meaning to steal the guns and ammuni-

tion, after which he hopes to leave us in the lurch. After we make sure that he is inside the tent, we can creep up and face him as he comes out laden with his booty. That is enough, since you understand," with which the captain laughingly arose to his feet and sauntered away, leaving the boys thrilled through and through.

CHAPTER X

SPRINGING THE TRAP

"I WONDER if the plan will work?" remarked Roger, when he and Dick once more found themselves alone, the captain having sauntered over to where some of the men were joking, Andrew Waller being the life of the company.

"If that torn part of a message meant anything," Dick told him, "and Captain Lewis is able to bait the trap in the right way, I believe this night will see the answer to the question that has been bothering us so long."

"Meaning that we will learn who the traitor is?" continued the other.

"Yes. Right now we are no nearer the truth than a week ago, you know, Roger. It may be any one of the three men we had in mind; or some one else, for that matter."

"Look at Andrew Waller, Dick. He seems to be in high spirits! Do you think that is all put on for effect? From the way he acts no one could ever dream he had an evil thought in his heart for his comrades of the long trail." "As we exhausted that subject a long time ago, Roger, and have learned nothing new since, there's no use trying to figure things out. Better wait, and, as my father says, 'hold our horses' until the trap is sprung—if it ever is."

"But, if we do trip him up," continued Roger, reflectively, "what do you believe Captain Lewis will do to the wretch?"

"He has not given us even a hint on that score," Dick replied.

"If the man is a traitor, and really tried to take our lives for pay, it seems to me it would be a shame if he were only drummed out of camp for such things. I know what Captain Clark would do if it rested in his hands."

"Yes, and I can guess the answer there, too, Roger; because he is a soldier, with stern ideas of what treachery means. But Captain Lewis has a tender heart, for all he can be so firm. He is very fond of the men who have clung to his fortunes in this great journey into the unknown country of the West."

"Do you really mean to say, Dick, he would forgive the rascal on that account?" demanded Roger, with a frown of displeasure on his face.

"Not exactly that," hastily replied the other lad. "I am sure that he would not want to

trust such a man again, but, at the same time, Captain Lewis would not believe it necessary to have the traitor shot, as a soldier would."

"In that case there would be only one other thing to do," observed Roger, disconsolately; "which would be to kick him out of camp, and warn him, just as he did Lascelles, that if he ever allowed himself to be seen near the camp again it would be at his peril."

"Mark my words, Roger, if we are lucky enough to catch the man in the act, that is what will happen to him. But, before he goes, he will listen to a ringing talk from Captain Lewis that will make his cheeks burn."

"Yes, and not for all the money Lascelles ever owned would I want to have such a fine man as Captain Lewis tell me that, as a traitor to my trust, I had sunk down until I was beneath contempt. But I wonder, Dick, how he will manage to let them know about the rifles and ammunition in the supply tent?"

"Depend on it the captain has that arranged cleverly enough," Dick declared, "and he will accomplish it without awakening any suspicion that it has been done for a purpose."

"What shall we do next?" asked Roger.

"Wait for his signal as arranged with us,"

explained Dick. "When we get that, it is our duty to slip out of camp without being noticed, and settle down in that patch of brush, just as he said. Later on, he will join us there, and bring Captain Clark with him."

They sat there and exchanged words for quite a long time, while the evening waned, and some of the tired men, who had been poling or rowing all day, began to creep into the tents, or, it might be, under rude bough shelters, where they expected to sleep through the remainder of the night.

"The time has come at last," said Dick, in a low tone.

"Did you see Captain Lewis make the gesture he explained to us?" asked his chum.

"Yes, and now let us see how smartly we can carry out our part of the game, as we laid it out in advance."

After surveying the field, the boys concluded that, by pretending to settle down in a certain place, they could withdraw by degrees without being noticed, and come up in the rear of the patch of bushes marked by the commander as the meeting spot.

This maneuver was accomplished with considerable skill, because both lads were well

drilled in Indian ways, and could snake their way along the ground as well as any painted brave on the warpath, seeking to spy on the enemy's camp.

In due time, therefore, they crept into the bushes, and settled down to await the coming of the two captains. Just as they expected, from their place of hiding it was possible to keep a close watch upon the supply tent, though the latter stood in the shadows, with the firelight playing on one side of it only.

Slowly the minutes crept along. The boys rarely exchanged words, and then only in the lowest of whispers; nor did they make any sort of move, lest in some way keen eyes discover their presence amidst the bushes.

It seemed ages before Roger pressed the arm of his cousin, and spoke in his ear.

"Something moving behind us, Dick!"

The other had also caught a faint rustling sound, and knew that in all probability the two captains must be about to join them. Surely enough, in a short time the men reached the side of the boys, exercising all the skill possible to avoid making their presence known to others.

Few words passed between them, for the plan of campaign had been laid out, and each one knew what lay before them. The firelight flickered upon the side of the supply tent, and it was in this quarter mostly that their gaze was fastened. In fact, Captain Lewis and his fellow officer depended wholly on the wide-awake boys to let them know when anything happened, for they themselves lay stretched out at full length upon the ground.

One by one the men sitting by the fire began to vanish, some yawning, and others simply stretching themselves with the air of weariness natural after a strenuous day at the oars.

Finally an atmosphere of desertion seemed to have come upon the camp. The fire died down slowly, and not a movement could be seen. Somewhere, near by, the appointed sentries stood guard, but their duty was wholly in the line of making sure that an enemy did not surprise the adventurous company from without. Those in the camp were supposed to be above suspicion.

Roger was beginning to grow impatient. The minutes were dragging along, so far as he was concerned, and he began to fear that, after all, the scheme, so cleverly planned by Captain Lewis, would fail to be a success.

What if the fellow had become suspicious, and

determined not to allow himself to be attracted by the bait? They would have their long night vigil for nothing, and be no nearer to learning the truth than before. Roger lacked the patience and perseverance of his chum, though he had many good qualities of his own.

It must have been almost midnight when Dick caught sight of a shadowy figure moving just beyond the supply tent. At first he thought it might be a wolf that had boldly crept into the camp, though such a thing seemed absurd; then he became satisfied that it must be a man on his hands and knees, crawling along slowly, and heading for the isolated tent.

When satisfied in this respect he whispered in the ear of Roger, and touched both the recumbent captains on the arm. This had been a signal agreed on in case of necessity, and, as they were on the alert, they lost no time in making good use of their eyes.

The creeper was now close to the tent. Every few feet he would sink down flat to the ground, and remain perfectly still for a time. No doubt at such intervals the man was listening intently to discover the slightest movement in the camp that might mean danger to him.

Both boys fairly held their breath when they

saw the shadowy figure reach the tent and hastily creep under the flap. Just how long it would take him to find what he was after no one could say, but the time had arrived for those who were watching the tent to make a forward move.

Fortunately the breeze started up just then, and rustled the leaves of the trees overhead. It came from a quarter that also bore the sounds of the fretting river, where rocky reefs impeded the progress of the current; so that a combination of sounds helped to deaden any little rustling noise the four watchers might make in rising to their feet and moving forward.

Every detail had been arranged, and they made immediately for the darker side of the tent. This was to avoid having their shadows appear on the canvas, and arousing the suspicions of the thief.

Having taken up their positions here, they waited for what was to follow, confident that the guilty one could not possibly escape them.

He could be heard moving around inside the tent. Once he upset some object that fell to the ground with a soft thud, and they even heard his low muttered exclamation of annoyance. After that all was still for an interval, as doubtless

he strained his hearing to learn whether the sound had aroused any curiosity in the mind of a sentry.

Then the movements started again, proving that renewed confidence was making the marauder bolder.

Dick and Roger had their guns ready, according to orders. If the man attempted to escape after being ordered to surrender their duty would be to shoot, although the endeavor would be to wound instead of to kill.

The movements within the tent had now ceased, and it was probable that the man had secured all he sought to acquire. That meant his next act would be to make his exit. Dick had not overlooked the chance of his creeping under the canvas at the rear of the tent, and, if they failed to see anything of him by the time another minute passed, he meant to creep around and ascertain whether this had been attempted.

Roger, giving a faint gasp, warned his chum that some one was coming. Then all of them caught sight of a dusky figure bending low as it crept out of the tent.

"Stand still and surrender, or you are a dead man!" suddenly exclaimed Captain Lewis, as, with his three companions, he stepped forward.

The thief made no attempt to run, for he knew what the result must be when he saw those rifles in the hands of the two boys. So they pushed up until they could make sure of his identity; and somehow neither Roger nor Dick felt any great surprise when they discovered that the man they had captured was Andrew Waller.

CHAPTER XI

BANISHED FROM CAMP

THE man held a couple of guns in his hands and was apparently loaded down with the ammunition that had been left as a most attractive bait. He hung his head as if at first overcome with a sense of shame; nor could the boys blame him for giving way to this feeling.

Some of the other men, awakened by the loud command of Captain Lewis, now came hurrying toward the spot. They were undoubtedly greatly astonished to discover what was taking place. And among the first to arrive were Drewyer and Fields, the two who in turn had been unjustly suspected of being the guilty person.

"Take those guns away from him," ordered Captain Lewis, "and then search him for ammunition! He was carrying off a good part of our visible supply, and meant to join forces with those rascally Frenchmen we let go last fall, fellows who are once more hanging about our trail for evil purposes."

Waller made no attempt to resist. Indeed, it would have been a foolish thing on his part, and could only have resulted in his being roughly treated. So presently they had stripped him of all his stolen goods, and even his own gun had been taken away.

After that he had to listen to the stinging words of reproach which Captain Lewis heaped upon him.

"The man who betrays his trust as you have done, Waller," said the other in conclusion, "deserves to be stood up before a file of soldiers and shot. That fate, indeed, would be your portion if you were an enlisted man, and had taken the oath of fidelity to the country. As it is I intend simply to send you out of this camp with the scorn of all honest men ringing in your ears. You can find those French friends of yours and make your bed with them."

"But you will not think of turning me out into the wilderness without some weapon with which to secure food, or to protect myself against the wild beasts?" the man found his tongue to say, with anxiety in his voice.

"Gun you shall have none, in punishment for your offense," he was sternly told. "Your hunting knife and a hatchet will be given to you, also a certain amount of provisions, sufficient to last you several days. For the rest, look you to those friends whose gold you accepted to betray these lads; for we can now understand who it was knifed their skin boat so that it might sink with them in the rapids!"

The man at bay opened his mouth as though tempted to declare that he had had nothing to do with such a base affair; but, on second thought, he stifled his intended denial. He must have decided that, since exposure had come, the less he had to say the better it would be for him in the end.

Under the orders of Captain Lewis his knife and hatchet were returned to him. Then a package of food was made ready and also given into his charge. Some of the men were grumbling to themselves, as though they did not approve of such leniency, for, according to their way of thinking, a traitor deserved but one punishment, and one that would place it out of his power to repeat his fault.

The man did not attempt to plead for mercy. He had a certain amount of pride; and, besides, he feared lest he be turned over to the soldiers for punishment, and he knew what to expect in that case.

"Now go forth," Captain Lewis told him, "and seek your new friends, or join the Indians whose treacherous ways you have even shamed by your acts. We warn you not to be seen again by any in this camp. Such is your reward for turning against those who trusted you. That is all."

Waller drew a long breath. He knew what it meant for him, should he fail to find the Frenchmen. Hundreds of miles lay between that spot and the nearest white settlement; and, unless he could get in touch with some of the Indian tribes along the Missouri, he would starve by the time another winter came around.

Being a woodsman, Waller of course knew many of the secrets of Nature, and could prolong his life by means of clever snares in which to catch small animals; but, with the coming of cold weather, his case would be pitiful unless he had help.

Dick felt sorry for the man at first. He believed Waller had simply yielded to temptation when he accepted the Frenchman's gold and agreed to work in his interest.

That feeling, however, did not last long, for, as the man started to leave the camp, he looked at the staring men contemptuously, and, on pass-

ing the two boys, scowled blackly, as the light of the resurrected fire disclosed.

"We may meet again!" he told Roger as he passed him; and there was a deep significance back of the words.

Perhaps it was fortunate for Andrew Waller that Captain Clark did not happen to hear what he muttered; for the soldier might have insisted that some more drastic punishment, than mere dismissal from the camp, be visited upon the culprit. But the threat was not heard by those in authority, and Waller went out into the darkness, and they saw no more of him for the time.

During the remainder of the night the boys slept peacefully. It was a great satisfaction to them both to feel that the mystery had now been solved, and that they need no longer fear treachery in the camp.

Then again it pleased Dick to know that neither Drewyer nor Fields had been connected with the plot against them, for he was very fond of both men, in a way, and had always believed them to be as honest as they were capable. History has written their names on the scroll of honor whereby the heroes of this remarkable enterprise are ever to be remembered.

On the following morning the journey was re-

sumed. Day succeeded day, and in many particulars they were very much alike. The travelers had difficulties to surmount, and often met with delays that were exasperating; but through it all shone that indomitable spirit that would not admit defeat.

"We have come too far to quit now," Captain Lewis would say when they were facing some new difficulty, "and the only thing to do is to push ahead despite temporary checks. The goal will soon be in sight, and the victory won. Then will come the reward when all men honor our names, and give us our meed of praise. It will be worth all it costs to win the thanks of the whole nation."

In this manner he cheered them when their spirits drooped. There never could have been a finer leader for such a tremendous undertaking than the former private secretary of President Jefferson. Every man in all that company felt that he would willingly go through fire and flood for Captain Lewis.

From time to time they met with Indians on the river, or came to some village on the bank. These natives had never as yet seen white men, and were, as a rule, disposed to be friendly. They seemed to have learned about a Great Father far away toward the rising sun, who was very rich and powerful, and whose favor it might pay them to seek.

Among the trappers connected with the party there were always those who could communicate with the Indians, partly by signs, but also with the aid of other and allied Indian tongues. In this way, then, it was possible to learn much concerning the nature of the country toward the west.

Strange, indeed, were many of the stories that came to the ears of the travelers. They heard of burning deserts, where for ten days they would find nothing but wastes of sand, except for a few cacti, or prickly pears. Here they were likely to leave their bones to the vultures and the prowling coyotes—the latter a small species of the wolf tribe, which the men of the expedition had begun to notice collecting about their camp at nights. These animals kept up a miserable chant in chorus, but they possessed a very cowardly nature, quite unlike the gray timber wolf.

If Captain Lewis and his followers had not possessed stout hearts they would have been dismayed by all they heard of the country lying beyond. The mountains reached above the clouds, rearing themselves in a most forbidding way, and were exceedingly rocky and devoid of vegetation.

Besides, there were tribes of fierce Indians living in the deep canyons who would lie in wait to overwhelm the pilgrims in hopes of obtaining their horses and those wonderful sticks that spat out fire. The beasts inhabiting those elevations were also awe inspiring, especially the bears, which, as the travelers already knew, were of the ferocious variety known as grizzlies.

In spite of all these thrilling stories there was no disposition manifested on the part of the explorers to back down. They had already met many perils without flinching, and it was too late now to show the white feather.

The summer was now well along, and, before a great while, they could expect to arrive at the headwaters of the Big Muddy. The two captains had decided that, when it was no longer possible to continue with the boats, they would make a permanent camp, where a portion of the expedition could spend the coming winter, while a certain number pushed on, to cross the rocky barrier and reach the sea, if such an accomplishment could be carried out.

Every day began to see changes in the flowing

current upon which they had been voyaging for so many months. Remembering its extreme width, down where their homes were located, it was hard indeed for the boys to believe that this narrow ribbon of clear water was the same stream.

"All that its banks hold these days," Dick had explained to Roger when the other was expressing these ideas, "comes from the melting snows away up in those mountains whose tops we sometimes think we can see far, far away to the west. That is why it is so clear and cold, and the fish we catch now are not like the ones we have often brought in to our mothers at home."

"The beautiful one, with the specks that were all the colors of the rainbow, must have been some kind of trout," Roger continued, his face lighting up eagerly, for he was a born angler, "and I only hope we are able to catch many more of the same kind. I never tasted such a fine fish, and the meat was of the true trout color, too."

"I think we can depend on taking many a fine mess of them from now on," Dick continued, "though we must try to find out from the Indians just where they lurk in the river. Perhaps one of these smaller creeks, that empty into the Missouri, may turn out to be a good place."

"To-morrow will be our chance then," Roger announced, "because I heard Captain Clark tell some of the men we would likely hold over for a day, so as to mend one of the boats that has been leaking badly and needs attention."

"Let us consider it settled that way, then, Roger; and we shall see what sort of luck the best of bait will fetch us. In some of the old stumps and dead wood we can find big, fat grubs, which I am sure the fish will take to savagely."

"I mean to start looking for bait this very evening when we make camp," declared Roger, evincing the greatest interest, for the memory of the feast they had enjoyed when that splendid speckled fish was broiled over the red coals had haunted him ever since.

That afternoon the air was unusually clear, and every one was able to see, off in the distance, the lofty peaks of the mountain barrier which must be scaled by the adventurous travelers before they could hope to reach the slopes, on the west, leading down to the blue waters of the Pacific. Somehow the knowledge that on this summer day they had almost arrived at an-

other positive stage of their great undertaking inspired their hearts with fresh hope. And in that cheering atmosphere camp was made when the shadows began to fall.

CHAPTER XII

ON FISHING BENT

"IF you think you can get on without me, Dick, I'd like to slip away for a little time," Roger was saying, after the boats had been run ashore, the horses tethered among the trees, and preparations for supper, with an attendant air of bustle, were well underway.

Of course Dick knew what was in the wind. He had not forgotten the remark made by his comrade that, if the chances were favorable, he meant to spend half an hour or so that evening collecting worms and grubs to be used as bait when they tried their luck at fishing on the next day.

"To be sure I can," he told Roger, with a smile. "All you have to do is to trot along with your hatchet, and something to put the grubs in—if you find any."

"Oh! I'm not afraid of being left in the lurch there," asserted Roger, stoutly. "I can see plenty of signs of dead wood around here. A "Keep your gun near you, and it would be better not to stray too far away from the camp," warned cautious Dick, speaking on general principles.

"You don't believe there's any danger lurking near by, do you?" asked Roger, though failing to show much concern, for his nature was daring and fearless.

"Nothing more than we always count on," the other told him. "But white men who are in a strange country must always figure on finding an enemy hiding back of some tree or rock, so keep your eyes about you, Roger. If I should hear your gun sound, or catch a hullo, depend on me to come in a hurry."

Roger only laughed, for he did not believe any peril could lurk so close to the camp. Still, accustomed to being on his guard, he made it a point to see that the powder was in the pan as he tucked his gun under his arm and strode forth.

He found to his relief that there were plenty

of old stumps and rotting logs close to where the fires had been started, so that he need not go any great distance away in order to begin his search.

His hatchet was soon brought into play, as he smashed some of the likely looking remnants of once proud forest monarchs. It required little muscular effort, scattering the soft punk-like wood, and, hardly had the boy obtained a fair start, than with a satisfied little cry he reached down and seized an enormous white grub whose home in the heart of the decayed stump he had broken open.

Just as Roger had anticipated, a rich harvest awaited him. Sometimes he came upon half a dozen prizes in one stump, and it was not long before he knew that, before the darkness became too dense for him to see how to work, he would have secured all the bait they could possibly use on the following morning.

At any rate, they would always have their hatchets with them, and, should their supply run low, there would be plenty of other opportunities to replenish their store.

So it was that he returned to camp much sooner than Dick in his most sanguine moments had imagined possible. There was hardly any need to ask Roger how his quest had turned out, for the broad smile on his tanned face told the story.

"A noble lot of fish lure," assented Dick, when he had examined the contents of the small box into which Roger had also cast a handful of powdered dead wood, in which his prisoners could conceal themselves. "I must say you struck it rich this time."

"And, unless the weather goes against us when morning comes," continued Roger, as he fastened up the box so that nothing could get at the bait during the night, "we ought to do some tall fishing, it strikes me. I'd just like to give the whole camp a splendid treat to those beauties of speckled rainbow fish which we believe to be a species of trout."

All evening long the subject was frequently in his mind, for Roger was one of those persistent persons who, once they have planned anything, can think of little else.

"I tell you what I mean to do after we've had our breakfast," he said at one time during the evening.

"All right," remarked Dick, who knew how useless it was to try to keep Roger's mind off his fishing, "suppose you do then, and I'll jot

it down in my notebook, for I'm making up my day's log, you see. Go on and tell me."

"If you look over there, Dick, you can see that friendly Indian who has insisted on sticking to us for two days now, walking along the shore, squatting close to our fires, and watching everything we do as though he was head over heels in love with the ways of the palefaces."

"Yes, I've often wondered what he could be thinking about," admitted Dick. "I've seen Captain Lewis trying to talk with him by signs, and often calling one of the men up to help out. From that I judged the Indian might be giving him some valuable information, which was why they allow him to tag after us so long, and even see that he gets his share of food at meal times."

"Well," continued Roger, "my idea is to go over to him now, and see if he can understand that we'd like to have him tell us about a good place for fishing in the morning; for, after all, what's the use of waiting until breakfast time; he might be gone in the night. What do you say to it, Dick?"

"Not a bad scheme," his chum assented.
"And, do you know, I think the brave has taken
some little interest in both of us, because a number of times it seemed to me he was watching us

closely. There's your chance now, for that matter, Roger; and, if you find it too hard to make him understand, get Jasper Williams, our good friend, to act as interpreter for you."

Upon that the impulsive Roger scrambled to his feet and presently he could be seen sitting close to the friendly Indian brave, engaging him in a strange conversation in which hands and smiles took the place of words.

Apparently, Roger finally found the task greater than he could manage, for he called to genial Jasper Williams, who joined them. Then the business of explaining to the dusky son of the wilderness was taken up anew; and with fair success, if the look on Roger's boyish face meant anything.

When he once more rejoined his chum he was fairly bubbling over with enthusiasm, so that Dick was not at all surprised to hear him exclaim:

"The finest of luck ever, Dick! Would you believe it? that brave tells us there is a small stream emptying into the Missouri a couple of miles above the camp, and that it is reckoned the best place for those big fat trout around this section of the country."

"That is good news, indeed," remarked Dick,

also pleased. "So we can look forward to supplying the camp with a mess of fish, if all goes well."

"Not only did he tell us that," continued the eager lad, "but he agreed to go along with us, and show where the best holes lie; for in hot weather, you know, all trout leave the shallows and gather in the deep, dark pools. If we didn't know just where those places were we might waste a lot of time trying."

At the time Dick thought they were very fortunate to be able to command the services of the friendly Indian, and he mentioned this belief to Roger.

"He seems to have taken a great fancy to the whites, and, no matter if he does eat like a hungry dog, we must not complain. He will hardly wish to go much further from his own people, and we may expect to wake up some fine morning to find that the brave has slipped off during the night."

"So long as he does not steal one of our horses or guns nobody will complain, I guess," chuckled Roger. "These Indians are a light-fingered set, take them all in all, and Jasper Williams says he never would trust one out of his sight."

Having made all their fishing arrangements the boys soon afterwards sought their shelter made from branches, and wrapped in their blankets tried to find sleep.

The camp was governed with military strictness, and there were sentries on duty all through the night, for Captain Clark had this part of the arrangements in charge. Not once up to this time had they been taken by surprise, though on several occasions roving bands of Blackfeet or Dacotahs had tried to steal their horses, only to meet with failure.

Securely guarded in this manner, they passed the night in peace, and so another dawn found them. As usual the travelers were early astir, for there were no laggards among them. Every man had his duties to perform, and strict discipline kept them to their various tasks.

Roger of course was about the first one up, though he knew that Dick could not be coaxed to make a start until he had performed every one of his duties as was his custom. If the fish were as plentiful as the friendly Indian had declared, they would have abundance of time to take heavy toll of their number long before noon came around.

"We decided to take one of the smaller boats

if it could be spared, you remember, Dick," Roger was saying as they ate breakfast.

"Yes," the other replied, "and I've already mentioned that to Captain Clark, who gave me full permission to do so. This is certainly one of the times we would enjoy having that buffalo-hide Indian boat we shot the rapids in. I was beginning to think we ought to change our minds about giving it away, when that accident happened, and ruined it for hard work."

"Accident!" echoed Roger. "We knew different after we found where that sharp knifeblade had been run along the bottom almost through the tough hide. But that sly dog of an Andrew Waller paid dearly for his work. I wonder what became of him; whether he joined the French trader and his son, or went over to the Indians."

"We may never know," his chum admitted.
"For my part, I hope and trust that neither of
us will ever set eyes on Waller again. I did not
like the look he gave us when he went out of
camp that day; and, like all guilty wretches
caught in the act of doing wrong, he blames us
for his troubles."

In good time Dick announced that he was

ready to make the start. Roger saw to it that they had the bait. Stout poles had also been secured, to the end of which the fishing lines were fastened. Such things as reels those pioneer lads never knew. When a prize was hooked it was their business to land the captive in the speediest way possible; and, as a rule, this consisted in swinging the struggling trout over their heads on to the land.

The Indian was hovering nearby. Dick fancied that he looked very eager, as though he quite enjoyed the idea of accompanying the pair on their fishing trip, and making himself useful. Perhaps, the boy thought, the poor fellow wished to attach himself to the expedition, on account of the charm it had for his untutored mind; for Indians could feel the desire for adventure such as urged these bold white men to penetrate farther day by day into the unknown country.

The boys picked out the boat best adapted to their needs, and which could be most easily spared. Beckoning to the Indian, the boys prepared to push out on the river. Two paddles were to be the means of urging the light craft against the strong current of the river, and an hour's time would be ample to see them to their

destination, Roger thought, as he commenced to wield the spruce blade vigorously.

Jasper Williams called out a last word of caution as they passed away, up the stream, for he felt a strong interest in these boys with whose fortunes he had been so intimately connected.

"Keep your eyes about you, lads," was what he told them, "and don't trust everything you see, just because it looks innocent. There's a difference between red and white, remember. Good luck to you both!"

Others also called out, begging the boys to remember that they too liked a mess of fresh fish; and, with these friendly voices ringing in their ears, Dick and Roger paddled swiftly up the river, soon losing sight of the explorer's camp.

CHAPTER XIII

GLORIOUS SPORT WITH THE TROUT

With lusty strokes the two boys urged the boat up-stream. The Indian sat amidship and seemed to be scanning the shore as though deeply interested in everything he saw; though, from what he told Jasper Williams, the locality must have been familiar to him, since he knew all about the fishing to be had in the smaller stream.

Now and then the boys exchanged a few words, though as a rule they kept most of their "wind," as Roger called it, for their arduous work.

"I wonder what Jasper Williams meant," remarked Roger, after they had gone possibly a full mile.

"Of course you mean when he said there was a difference between red and white," Dick suggested. "I was thinking of the same thing myself, and came to the conclusion it must have been Jasper's way of telling us to keep an eye

on our dusky pilot here. In plain words, he warned us to look out for our guns."

"Which we will certainly be sure to do!" commented Roger. "Though, after all, we may be wronging the poor Indian by our suspicions."

"If he never knows it there can be no harm done, don't you see?" Dick told him.

Various things about the shore attracted their attention just then, and for the time being they forgot all about the red man, and the warning given by their old frontiersman friend, Jasper Williams.

"The farther we go up the river," Dick was saying, "the greater the forests seem to become. From all I've been able to learn, we will pass through many a stretch of wood before we reach the foot of the big mountains."

"Yes," added Roger, "and, as the river is getting more and more shallow every day, Captain Lewis seems to believe we must soon abandon our boats, and take to the horses for the rest of the journey."

"Look up ahead and on the left, you will see signs of a stream coming into the Missouri. That must be where we are to stop."

At that Dick made gestures to the Indian, who,

quickly comprehending what was wanted, nodded his head in the affirmative.

"Yes, he says that is the place," Roger observed, as he started to put still a little more viminto his strokes with the paddle, so, as Dick was compelled to follow suit, or have the boat headed in toward the shore, their progress increased to a wonderful degree.

In good time they reached the mouth of the tributary stream. It was found to be as clear and cold as any one could wish on a warm day. No wonder, Roger thought, the trout loved to frequent its waters, and lie in the deep, dark pools that doubtless existed here and there, though without a guide they could have been found only after much patient searching.

Obeying the gestures of the Indian, they made for the shore and left the boat, first making sure that it was pulled well up. Of course, besides their poles and the little box of bait, they carried their faithful guns along with them.

So far as they could see, the friendly Indian seemed to be almost as deeply interested in the outcome of the fishing trip as the boys themselves were. He immediately led them to a certain spot on the bank, holding up a hand to impress upon them the need of caution and silence

when attempting to catch the wary fish of many colors.

Roger was already prepared, for he had fastened one of the largest and most attractive grubs to his hook. Creeping up close to the edge of the bank he thrust his long pole carefully forward, and allowed the baited hook, with a small lead sinker attached to the line a foot above, to sink into the depths.

As it slowly descended Roger's heart was beating tumultuously, for he had been entertaining high hopes. These were not doomed to disappointment, for, even before he found bottom, there was a sudden vicious tug, and the end of the stout pole began to move up and down vigorously.

Immediately Roger, who had laid his gun down at his feet so as to have the free use of both hands, hunched his shoulders in the effort to lift his prize. As it came struggling out of the water, he switched it high in the air and it fell with a thud some little distance behind the excited fisherman. At this good luck Roger could hardly contain himself.

A warning "hist" from Dick told him to repress the shout of triumph that was bubbling to his lips, and he realized the necessity for silence

if they expected to continue the sport, as the trout are easily alarmed.

The capture proved to be a magnificent specimen of the lovely variety of trout that differed from anything either of the boys had ever seen before. In later years this vigorous species of fighter was classified, and given the deserved name of "rainbow trout," and for a very good reason, as any one who has ever seen one fresh drawn from the water will admit.

Meanwhile Dick started in to try his luck, and it certainly began to look as though the Indian had told only the truth when he said the fish lay in countless numbers in those deep shadowy pools, for, just as had happened in Roger's case, there was a fierce pull on his pole, and Dick found himself struggling with a captive that it required all his powers to land successfully.

So the sport progressed, the friendly Indian hovering near them and often, when the bites came less frequently, leading the way to some new spot on the bank, where another pool would be found.

Always did they find these places inhabited by a hungry family of trout, eager to snap at the attractive lure which was dangled in front of them. The Indian gathered up the spoils as they went along. He knew just how to fashion a tether out of tough but yielding willow, and, when half a dozen of the trout had been strung in this manner, he saw to it that they were placed in the water to keep fresh, while the sport continued as before.

Roger was enjoying himself as he had hardly ever done before. Such royal fishing, and such game fighters made a combination that ought to have been sufficient to fill any boy's heart with supreme joy, especially one so devoted to the sport as Roger had always been.

Dick did not lose his head over the wonderful success that was coming their way. Because Roger gave himself up so wholly to the excitement was a very good reason why Dick himself should do the watching for both of them.

And yet it seemed almost absurd to suspect that anything evil could be threatening them on that bright summer morning. The very insects seemed to hum more noisily than usual, as though with the pleasure of living on such a perfect day.

Dick often cast a side glance toward the Indian, but so far he had seen absolutely nothing suspicious in his manner. He seemed to be as

happy as Roger, and kept close to the heels of the boy as he worked his long rod, and added constantly to the number of fish he was taking.

It seemed as though each one of the grubs was good for a fat trout, and so savagely did the fish snap at them that they were securely hooked in nearly every instance, so that the losses were next to nothing.

If things continued to go on as they were doing, they would soon be in possession of all the fish the camp could use. Roger even told his chum in a whisper that, unless they looked out, they would be unable to carry the whole of their taking back in one trip of the boat, though possibly that was only meant in the light of a boast.

Dick's arms were beginning to ache on account of the strain on the muscles caused by raising so many heavy prizes over his head. He would have suggested that they had quite a large mess now, and perhaps had better go back to camp, allowing some of the others the pleasure of coming up later and trying their luck; but he knew Roger well enough to feel sure that the other would decline to quit fishing as long as a single grub remained.

At any rate, when the supply was really ex-

hausted, Dick meant to decline to linger any longer, or to look for a new lot of bait.

For the moment the fish seemed to have stopped biting.

"We have only about six more grubs left, Dick," said Roger, after examining the contents of the bait box, "and that ought to mean as many fish, if the Indian guide knows of still another good hole. I'm going to try to ask him. And, Dick, I promise you on my word of honor that I'll agree to quit when we use up the last bait. I can see that you're getting tired. You never were as crazy over the sport as I have always been."

"It's a bargain then, Roger," assented the other, pleased to know that his comrade meant to be reasonable about it, for he had half-expected trouble in trying to tear the other away from such a fascinating game.

Roger accordingly began to make motions to the Indian, and the other must have understood what he wanted, for he nodded his head, and beckoned to them to follow where he led.

Dick would rather have remained where he stood, but he did not wish to have Roger go off alone with the Indian brave, so he went along. He thought the copper-colored visitor at the

camp showed even more eagerness than at any previous time in the immediate past, as though he had been keeping the finest place of all to the last, in order to further astonish them.

Indeed, when Dick saw Roger drag out a trout that exceeded all the rest in size and fierceness he decided that he had guessed the true reason for that look he had detected on the usually emotionless face of the brave.

Again did Roger drop his baited hook in, and with a similar result. He was fairly trembling with the excitement, and, too, a little weariness; but according to his count there still remained four more grubs, and the work must proceed. As Dick seemed bent on letting him finish the tale, Roger, nothing averse, set to work to get his hook in readiness once more.

The spot was a picturesque one. Several large trees grow close to the edge of the stream, casting their shadows upon the water just where the deep pool lay. In the dusky depth the trout were lying, and hungry at that. Dick could not remember of ever having seen such a combination of scenery and splendid fishing grounds, and he believed the memory of that day would always be marked with a white stone in their lives.

It certainly was destined to be remembered, but not on these accounts alone. There were other reasons why the pioneer boys would look back to that sunny day and conjure up ghosts of the past.

Roger was making good his boast that he meant to take six fish with those half dozen grubs, for already a third one had been pulled in.

The Indian, apparently just as deeply interested in the sport as Roger himself, was hanging at the boy's elbow, and every now and then making gestures as though showing him where to drop his hook the next time. It seemed as though his wonderful eyes were able to pierce those dark depths and discover where the largest fish was lazily working his fins, as he faced the current, waiting for something suited to his taste to come within striking distance.

There was nothing at all suspicious about this, and Dick was beginning to believe the vague fears that had oppressed him must have been the result of too much imagination, when without the slightest warning something happened.

He saw a dark object drop from the branches of the tree directly upon the back and shoulders of poor Roger, who was instantly carried to the ground. Dick's first inclination was to give a shout, and raise his gun, for he had seen their dusky guide pounce upon the weapon which Roger had laid on the grass at his feet.

Before Dick could make a move, however, he too felt a heavy weight strike him on the shoulders so that he was knocked to his back; and, as he lay there gasping for breath, he looked up into the painted faces of several Indian warriors who came dropping from the trees as though they were over-ripe plums in a gale of wind.

After all, the supposed friendly Indian had played them false, and had actually led the two boys into a cleverly arranged ambuscade.

CHAPTER XIV

PRISONERS OF THE DACOTAHS

DICK knew the folly of resistance when he saw that, besides the two warriors who held him down, there were half a dozen others nearby. Roger, always impulsive and headstrong, was struggling desperately, though without the slightest chance of breaking away from his captors. Understanding what was taking place close by, Dick called out:

"Give up, Roger; it is foolish to fight against such odds. You will only be hurt for your pains, and nothing gained. Leave it all to me!"

Not only did Roger hear these words, but his own good sense told him the wisdom of yielding to overwhelming numbers. But it was always a difficult thing for Roger to believe in the old saying to the effect that "he who fights and runs away may live to fight another day."

After being disarmed the two boys were allowed to get upon their feet. They discovered

that their dusky captors undoubtedly belonged to the same tribe as their treacherous guide, and, therefore, must be Dacotahs. That guide was clutching Roger's gun as though he expected to retain it as the price of his labors in thus entering the camp of the strange "palefaces," and luring the two boys into the trap so cunningly contrived.

Dick was far from downcast. It took considerable to make him feel as though everything were dark around him. And, in order to cheer Roger up, as well as to arouse his interest in planning an escape, the first remark Dick made was in the line of an attempt to guess how it had all been planned.

"Look, they are marking a smoke now," he told his companion, as several of their captors struck flint and steel together, and with the spark thus generated started a fire in a little pile of greenish-looking wood.

"That must be meant for a signal to some one who is away from here," Roger commented, on observing what was going on. "Dick, what does all this mean? You are always good at hitting on the truth while I grope in the dark. Why do you think these Indians want to make us prisoners?"

"It was a trap, you understand, Roger?"

"Oh! yes, that's as plain as can be," replied the other, readily enough; "for they were all hiding up in these trees while we kept on fishing so merrily, without dreaming that we were being watched every minute of the time."

"And, Roger, the guide led us into the mess; now we can understand why he was so eager to fetch us up here."

"Then you believe, do you, Dick, he planned this thing; that perhaps he even entered our camp with such a game in his mind?"

"It begins to look that way, I am sorry to say," Dick replied.

"But can he be in the pay of that revengeful Frenchman, François Lascelles?" demanded Roger, rather appalled by the thought.

"We will soon know, because, unless I am mistaken, that smoke they are sending up yonder is meant to call him here. And it would not surprise me very much, Roger, if that brave who has been eating at our campfire for two days, crept out last night and told how he had been engaged to take us to this stream to-day. That would account for the Indians being concealed here."

The boys were without weapons, and could

do nothing toward the making of their escape; so they waited with what patience they could command to see what was about to happen.

Shortly afterwards some one was seen approaching, at sight of whom Roger gave utterance to an exclamation of disgust.

"Why, after all, it's that skunk, Andrew Waller!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, he must have found some way to get in with these Indians, and they have been working for his interests," Dick suggested. "Perhaps he has lied to them, and made them believe we are two very important persons. He may take the trouble to explain the thing to us, thinking it will add to his glory."

"I can see the look of satisfaction on his face from here," said Roger, in a surly tone, as though it cut him to the quick to have the traitor triumph over them in that way.

Waller soon arrived on the scene, and his first act was to look insolently into the faces of the two boys.

"So, you fell to the bait, did you, boys? When I told you we would meet again you didn't believe it would be so soon. And let me say that you are going to be in a pretty pickle after this.

These Indians will make sure that you do not slip through their hands."

"What have you been telling them about us?" demanded Roger, impetuously. "Some big lie I am sure, for it would be just like you."

The man frowned as though angry, and Dick feared he was about to strike the bold boy a blow in the face, which would have precipitated a fight in which Roger would have gone down to defeat. However, Waller managed to keep his temper in control, and sneering again, went on to say:

"Oh! to make sure that you would be held a close prisoner, I merely told them that you boys were the sons of the Big White Father away off in the Land of the Rising Sun; and that if they held you safe they could demand a great ransom in wampum, sticks-that-shoot-fire, and everything that the heart of an Indian could wish. In other words I have cooked your goose for you. You may be sure you will never be allowed to go free."

He turned his back on them and commenced talking with one of the Dacotahs, who, from the feathers in his black hair, seemed to be some sort of sub-chief. Much of the conversation was carried on by gestures, in which Waller seemed to be unusually expert.

Dick watched closely in the hope that he might be able to catch the drift of what was passing between the two. That he and Roger were the objects under consideration he had not the slightest doubt, for several times one or the other pointed toward the spot where they stood.

"Can you make it out at all, Dick?" Roger asked.

"I am sorry to say it's more than I've been able to understand, Roger; but I think he's telling the chief again how valuable we are as prizes. And to think we have no way of proving to him that we are only ordinary boys, without rich fathers to pay a big ransom. It is just the sort of game we might have expected Andrew Waller to play."

The man who had been sent out of the camp of the explorers now approached them again. He was rubbing his hands as though in great glee.

"Now, I shall not only have my pick of two good guns, but plenty of ammunition for them, in spite of Captain Lewis. I am going to say good-by to you here, for I have to meet M'sieu Lascelles at an appointed rendezvous. Oh! he will be very much pleased when he learns how the Dacotahs prize the boys he hates so bitterly, and mean to carry them off to their villages, far

to the north, there to keep them until the big ransom arrives. It tickles me to know how soon my debt to you has been so nicely cancelled."

Roger gritted his teeth, but he managed to keep from saying anything.

"Just as you told us when you were leaving camp, we may meet again, Andrew Waller," Dick said, with an unmistakable meaning in his voice.

"Oh! that is possible," the other jauntily added, purposely misunderstanding what the boy meant; "for it may be M'sieu Lascelles, he would wish to see for himself that you are comfortable, so for that reason we might journey into the Dacotah country ourselves."

With that thrust he waved his hand to them, and, turning, walked away as he had come. None of the Indians paid the least heed to his movements; but Roger almost choked in his indignation.

"Just to think, Dick," he muttered in a quivering voice, "the beast is carrying my dear old gun which he took from our red guide, on his shoulder. How much I will miss it, because, ever since I've been able to look along the sights of a rifle, that gun has been my companion day and night."

"We shall hope that in some way or other you will see it again," Dick told him. "Even if not, there are others just as sure shooters at the camp. The one he used to own, and which they refused to let him carry off, is even a bettermade weapon than yours."

"Yes, but that gun has associations away above its value in money," said Roger, heaving a sigh; "and at the best the chances of my ever handling it again are three against one."

"Well, we must try to think of other things now," Dick told him.

"You mean about escaping from our captors, don't you, Dick? What if we can convince them that Waller is a man with a double tongue, and that what he told them about our being the sons of the Great White Father at Washington is only a package of lies?"

"Of course we can try, but I'm afraid it will be useless, because the Indians want to believe that wonderful story. See how all of them are examining my gun now. I suppose every one of them is picturing himself as owning just such a marvelous weapon that 'spits out fire,' and kills the game just as thunder and lightning do in the storm." "What do you think they expect to do with us now?" asked Roger.

"They will not want to stay here much longer," affirmed Dick, "because they are afraid of the 'palefaces with their thunder sticks.' Consequently, they will start off toward their village, which we understand lies several days' journey away from here toward the northwest."

"But, when we fail to come back to-day, Captain Lewis is bound to send some of his best trackers up here to learn what happened to us. And, Dick, surely they will try to follow our captors, and effect our rescue."

"Listen, Roger. We must not leave it all to them. These cunning red men know how to cover a trail so that the keenest eye cannot find a trace. Depend on it, they will leave no stone unturned to hide the tracks we make. And then, besides, do we not know that the summer is already beginning to wane?"

"Yes, yes, all that is only too true, Dick. Captain Lewis understands there is no time to spare, with those terrible mountains yet to be scaled, and also black deserts to cross, and all before snow flies. I am much afraid he will decide that the success of the whole undertaking would be put in peril should he detach any of his

men to engage in a wild goose hunt for us."

"We two have before this been in positions of peril," said Dick, firmly, with a flash in his eyes that aroused new hope in the breast of his chum; "and always, in times that are past, have we succeeded in saving ourselves. So let us keep up our spirits and watch constantly for a chance to give these Indians the slip."

"If we should find the opportunity," said Roger, immediately, "I hope we manage to get hold of your gun, and our hatchets and knives. To lose my good shooting-iron is bad enough, but that knife, you know, has served me since I was knee-high to a grasshopper. Promise me you will do your level best to save our side-arms if we find a way to escape, Dick!"

To this entreaty Dick assented. Indeed, he knew well enough that it was their only policy to go away armed rather than in a helpless condition.

Shortly afterwards they were given to understand, through grunts and gestures, that the march was about to be taken up. With several Indians stalking along in single file ahead, and others bringing up the rear the two boys had to turn their backs upon the "Big Muddy" and start upon the long journey into the Northwest, at the end of which lay the Dacotah village.

CHAPTER XV

WHEN STOUT HEARTS WERE NECESSARY

"WE have covered a good many miles since starting, Dick, and I hope they soon show signs of stopping for the night."

The afternoon was getting well along when Roger made this remark to his cousin. His tone had a vein of complaint in it, for, although Roger could tramp through the woods all day and feel it but little, he did not like being forced to do the walking against his will.

Another thing that fretted the boy was the fact that every furlong passed over carried them further away from their friends of the expedition, the only whites, saving the French traders, within hundreds of miles.

Dick had begun to notice this growing feeling of irritation on the part of his comrade. He himself could look trouble in the face without flinching, and he now concluded it was time to cheer up Roger's drooping spirits.

"No question but that they intend to pull up

pretty soon, Roger," he said, as he trudged along close to the other's elbow. "In fact, I've noticed some of them looking about as if they expected to reach a good camp-ground at any minute. They were tired at the time they lay in wait for us, and must have come a long way."

"Of course you noticed, Dick, that two of the braves stayed behind when we left the river, though they did catch up with us several hours afterwards?"

"Yes, and it is not difficult to guess what their part in the retreat was," replied Dick. "They remained to conceal every trace of moccasined feet, so that it would have to be a mighty good tracker who could tell what had happened there on the bank of the small stream."

"Yes, and of course they've blinded our trail in the bargain every now and then on the way," continued Roger, ruefully. "Three separate times did we walk for half a mile in shallow water, and leave the creek on the stones, so there would be no sign left after the sun and wind dried the wet marks. It was the old Indian trick that we know so well."

"I tried my best to leave a plain track," added Dick, "but the braves coming behind must have seen me do it, and made sure to cover it." "What do you believe Captain Lewis will do about it?" asked Roger, he himself having pondered on this subject without coming to a conclusion.

"When we fail to return to the camp of course they will send some of the men up to look the ground over," Dick answered, thoughtfully. "The disappearance of the friendly Indian will give them a clew. Then they are apt to find some of the trout that were left behind fastened to the willow withes."

"I hope they enjoy them," muttered Roger, with a grimace, for he could not help remembering how his mouth had fairly watered with anticipation of the treat he had expected to have that evening.

"I've been wondering, myself, how it came that the Indians overlooked taking the fish," continued Dick, "and the only thing I can see is that they were so anxious to get on the move before any of the white men came along with those terrible 'fire-shooting-sticks,' that they forgot about it."

"Yes," Roger added, "and that treacherous chap who guided us into the trap was so taken up looking over your gun, which Waller had turned over to him, that he forgot all about the

fish, too. Well, I hope they are found, and will make a fine supper for the men."

"It has clouded up, and looks a little as if we might have a storm of some kind before morning breaks," went on Dick.

"More trouble if that happens," grumbled the other, glancing up at the heavens to verify his comrade's statement.

"It may turn out to be a great help to us, for all we know, and give us a chance to make our escape."

"What, do you think that, after all, some of the trailers among our friends will be able to follow us, and take these Indians by surprise?" asked Roger.

Dick, however, shook his head at this.

"To tell you the truth, Roger," he observed,
"I'm afraid we can count on no such help from
our friends, even if they could discover our trail,
which is much in doubt."

"But why not?" demanded the other. "Captain Lewis thinks a lot of us, and he is hardly the man to desert a friend, Dick."

"Every word of that is true," his chum assured him. "There never could be a finer man than Captain Lewis; but stop and think, Roger;

he is not on business of his own now, but bent on carrying out a great exploring expedition that was sanctioned by Congress, and backed by President Jefferson himself. Every day counts in the spelling of success; a delay here might ruin all their plans."

Roger nodded his head, as though he grasped the idea.

"Yes, I can see what you mean, Dick," he admitted, slowly and regretfully, "and I guess you are right. Much as Captain Lewis himself might want to lay over and send a party of his men out in search of us, his duty binds him the other way. He will have to go on, and leave us to our fate."

"Well, we have been able to take care of ourselves lots of times before now, Roger, and why not again?"

Somehow his last words seemed to arouse the dormant spirit of confidence in the other. Roger gritted his teeth, while his eyes flashed defiantly.

"You're right, Dick, we have done plenty of things before, and can again," he declared with a ring in his voice that Dick liked to hear. "Our fathers never showed the white feather when they faced troubles just as bad, and why should we? How many times have we listened to them tell how they followed that band of Iroquois Indians ever so far into the North, and rescued their sister Kate, who had been carried away.1 I'm done with repining, Dick; from now on you'll find me different."

"Then to-night, when we are in camp, we must try to outwit these red rascals. Even now I have something of a plan in my mind. And you may be sure that every mile we covered I kept tally of the direction, so I know just how to go in order to reach the Missouri again."

"You shame me, Dick," frankly admitted the other boy; "to know that, while I've been fretting and complaining, thinking only of our troubles, you were keeping track of such things as would help us get back to our friends."

A little later on, Dick, who seemed to keep his eyes constantly on the alert, once more spoke to his comrade.

"There's something brewing, as sure as you live, Roger," he said; "for the Indians are consulting together in hushed tones, and examining the ground as if they had run across some tracks there that excited them."

¹ See "The Pioneer Boys on the Great Lakes."

"Can it be game, and they are being tempted to start on a hunt?" asked Roger.

"Two-footed game, then," replied the other boy, "for I can see there are moccasin tracks all around. Of course, as the different tribes make moccasins after their tribal way, it's easy for these Dacotahs to know the others are not of their kind."

"They certainly do act as if they suspected there might be a breath of danger hanging around, Dick. Do you know whether the Sioux and the Dacotahs are enemies or not?"

"They have been in the past," acknowledged Dick; "but I know the print of a Sioux moccasin, and these are different, Roger."

"Perhaps Shoshones. You remember Captain Lewis told us we were likely to run upon some of that warlike tribe at any time now. Yes, and he remarked that, as a rule, they were enemies to the Blackfeet, Crows, Flat Heads, Dacotahs, and nearly every other tribe up in the Northwest."

"I shouldn't be surprised if you have hit on the truth, Roger, and that this war party turns out to be fierce Shoshones. Our good friend, Captain Lewis, said he hoped to make friends of them, since we must pass through their country before striking the great mountains."

"There, we are going on again, Dick, but notice how the braves keep looking to the right and to the left, as if they feared an ambush. The Shoshones must be a fierce lot of fighters, or else be in overpowering numbers."

"I think, if I can read an Indian's mind," said Dick presently, "these braves will make an early camp. If they start a fire at all it will be only a small one without smoke, and hidden in a hole, so that its light will not betray them."

"Then there's a poor chance for supper, I take it," grumbled Roger, who, having a splendid appetite, did not fancy going hungry, or chewing on a tough piece of pemmican, or jerked venison.

"You often complain of things being dull, Roger; but I am sure you must admit there's no lack of excitement for us now. We are prisoners in the hands of the hostile Indians; there is a storm threatening; and now comes a chance that, before morning, the camp may be attacked by these Shoshones who are out looking for plunder and scalps."

"If they should come, Dick, what do you suppose would happen to us?"

Roger felt rather anxious, for he had heard it said that among Indians it was the custom to kill their prisoners rather than have them rescued, or taken away by a rival tribe.

"If I can carry out my plans," Dick assured him, "I don't mean to wait until the camp is attacked. I'd like to be miles on the way back to the river before that comes to pass, if it really does."

"There, I think we are going to pull up at last," ventured Roger, as he saw the leading Indians halt, and begin to look around as though to make sure that no enemy lurked in the neighboring woods.

It was a well-chosen spot for a concealed camp. A shallow depression, very like a large bowl, offered them a chance to build a small fire without any risk of the blaze being seen; and, so far as smoke was concerned, those dusky sons of the forest could be counted on to select such wood that there would not be sent up the slightest column of vapor to betray them.

Roger, still watching, soon uttered a low cry of satisfaction.

"See, Dick, they do mean to have a little cooking-fire!" he exclaimed; "and that means we may get some supper after all. So far they

have shown us no particular ill will, and treated us half-way decently."

"That comes of being taken for the sons of the Great White Father at Washington," remarked Dick, with a chuckle that told that his spirits had not been crushed even though the future looked so dark and forbidding. "It is a high honor that has come to us, Roger, to be reckoned President Jefferson's own boys!"

Roger, however, was more interested in what was going on about the little fire than anything else. He observed just how the expert braves formed a small pyramid, and then used the flint and steel to start a tiny blaze.

"Yes, one of them is unwrapping that bundle he carries, Dick," the boy went on to say, "and, just as I expected, it contains some freshly killed venison. Oh! it's going to be all right, and we are due for some supper, I reckon."

But Dick was thinking of other things than eating just then. He surveyed with a critical eye the lowering sky, and wondered if a storm was about to break upon them before morning came.

CHAPTER XVI

THE ESCAPE

The two prisoners had been made to sit down, and were under constant surveillance. It would not have been possible for them to make any move looking to escape without being immediately detected. Dick realized the foolishness of such an attempt, and made no effort for the time being.

Those eyes of his noted everything that was going on around him, for he knew the time was approaching when utter darkness would come, and, if they expected to make a move, memory must take the place of sight.

Just as Roger had been hoping, the Indians cooked some of the venison, though in a primitive fashion. Numerous pieces, as they were sliced from the haunch, were impaled on the ends of long slivers of wood, and the latter thrust into the earth in such fashion that the meat received the full heat of the little fire.

Of course, when cooked it was also partly

burned, but this made no difference to any one who was really hungry. The two boys were glad to receive their share of the venison, and devoured it eagerly.

"Of course they'll tie us up, as Indians always do their prisoners, Dick?" suggested Roger, while they were still munching at the food provided by their captors.

"There's no doubt about that," the other told him. "Already I have noticed one of the warriors looking over some long deerskin thongs, and then glancing in our direction. I think they are only waiting until we get through eating."

"Then for one I mean to keep at it as long as I can," affirmed Roger; "because I never did like the idea of being tied to a tree. I suppose that is what they mean to do with us, Dick."

"We'll soon know, Roger, and, now that I have the chance, I want to tell you about the little scheme I have in my mind."

"I wish you would!" hastily exclaimed the other; "and I hope it will turn out to be a success."

"You may remember," began Dick, "that I have hands that somehow I can double up into a very small compass. Many a time you've

tried to fasten my wrists together to see if I could get my hands free, and in nearly every case I did the trick by stretching the thongs a little, and then slipping a hand out."

"Oh! now I begin to see what you hope to do, Dick; and, let me tell you, the skies look brighter already. I'm sure you can set your hands free, if only it doesn't stop at that."

"One step at a time, Roger; we mustn't expect to run before we can walk. Once my hands are loose, it will be a queer thing if in some way I fail to set both of us free. But here comes several of the Indians this way, as though they mean to trice us up. Better hurry and eat that last bit of meat, if you wouldn't lose it."

"I suppose I'd better," grumbled Roger, "but I don't see why they want to be in such a dreadful hurry about tying us up. Ugh! a whole night of standing against a tree is something I don't like at all."

It turned out just as Dick had said, for the Indians indicated by signs that they wished the two boys to stand up and back against a couple of trees that happened to grow close together.

From the way in which the deerskin thongs were used to tie the captives to the trees it was evident that the braves had had long practice at this art. When they had used up all the hide rope, Dick and Roger were indeed in a helpless position, being bound hand and foot.

"This is about as hard as anything we ever went through, Dick," remarked Roger, after the Indians had finished their task and left them there.

"Yes, that is very true, Roger, but I want to tell you that I can move one of my hands, and I'm starting to stretch this buckskin thong. After a short time I believe I can get my hands free."

"That's good news; and what next, Dick?"

"If only that brave doesn't happen to remember that he stuck his knife into my tree right here, and return to possess himself of it, why, don't you see how fortunate that is going to turn out for us?"

"A knife so close to your hands once you get them free—that would be simply glorious, Dick. And I'm going to keep hoping that warrior has no need for his blade during the whole night."

"I believe I can reach it," continued Dick, twisting his head around to take another look at the coveted weapon; "and if I do, one slash will cut this buckskin rope. After that, you can depend on me to jump over to your side. But

keep on working your hands all you can, Roger, for the looser your bonds are the better in the end."

The night was by now closing in around them. Some time before the fire had been carefully extinguished, water being thrown on the burning embers to hasten its end. Dick, still watching the actions of the Indians, soon saw they were taking extra precautions against a surprise. From all of the signs the boys concluded that these Dacotahs had good reason to fear the coming of the hostile war party.

"I've got an idea," he told Roger in following out this train of thought, "that not so very long back the Dacotahs must have made a raid on the lodges of the Shoshone tribe, and done more or less damage. Somehow they act to me as if guilty."

"And, Dick, if ever the two parties do clash, there will be a lively time of it, we can be sure," Roger in turn remarked. "These braves seem to be a picked lot, as far as I can tell, and ought to put up a good fight, even if outnumbered."

"While I've never watched a real battle between two war parties of Indians," observed Dick, "I must say I'm not dying with curiosity to see one. I only hope we have a chance to get away from here before it happens. And, Roger, another thing—I'm keeping an eye on that fellow who is carrying my gun. He has placed it, together with the powder-horn and bullet-pouch, on that log yonder, you notice."

"Now it is queer that I hadn't noticed such a thing, Dick!"

"Simply because you waste so much time bothering about our hard luck, when you might just as well be using eyes and ears to learn something worth while," the other boy told him. "Now, if only I can manage to snatch up my gun and other fixings when we leave here, it will make me happy, I can tell you."

The minutes dragged along slowly to the two boys. When an hour, and then two, had passed, Roger was beginning to complain again, for it was weary work being forced to stand in this way upon their feet.

By this time the Indians had ceased their low droning talk. Only one of them was still sitting there cross-legged, smoking his red clay pipe. Dick did not doubt that somewhere in the gloom one or two sentries, or videttes, had been posted, in order to guard against a surprise in every way possible, though of course he could not see the first sign of their presence.

Only the customary sounds of a summer night in the wilderness came to the ears of the captive pioneer boys. Most of these were very familiar to them, on account of their habit for years of spending nights out of doors.

Still, somehow, things did not seem quite the same as usual. It was different listening to the hoot of the owl, the croak of the night heron, the complaint of the tree-frog calling for more rain, or even the barking of a red fox somewhere in the forest, when tied up in this way, and facing such a gloomy outlook.

"Dick," whispered Roger, "isn't it nearly time?"

"Not yet," replied the other in the same cautious manner, "hold your horses, and have patience, Roger. Another hour or two must go by before I dare start in."

Poor impatient Roger groaned, and relapsed into silence again. Oh! how time did drag along. It seemed to the boy he would go fairly wild, waiting for something to break that terrible monotony.

There were no stars overhead by means of which they could tell how the night was wearing on. Dick had to resort to other means by which to mark the passage of time; still he knew fairly

well when the hour of midnight approached.

Meanwhile Roger had finally fallen asleep, uncomfortable as his position was. Dick could just manage to see, by straining his eyes, that his chum's head had fallen forward upon his chest, as though tired Nature had overcome him.

Dick concluded that there was no use waiting any longer to put his plan into operation. Everything about the camp seemed silent, and, although he took a desperate chance, the boy believed he would gain nothing by further delay.

His initial act was to draw first one hand and then the other from the stretched buckskin thongs. Then turning as best he could he reached out toward the knife the Indian who had helped tie them to the tree had left sticking there, even with the boy's head.

What a thrill passed through Dick's whole frame as his eager hand touched that welcome blade. It's buckhorn handle, too, felt very familiar, and he was almost sure it would turn out to be the hunting-knife Roger valued so highly because of the associations connected with it.

As it possessed a keen edge, he found no diffi-

After that he stopped and listened, but there was nothing to indicate that his actions had been discovered. The owl had commenced his mournful hooting again; and the tree-frog piped up louder than ever, Dick noticed with considerable satisfaction, for he hoped the sounds would muffle any slight noise he would chance to make.

Now he turned to set Roger free. He hoped in his heart that, upon being aroused, Roger would not utter an exclamation. With this possibility in mind Dick very cautiously crept over to the other tree.

He could hear Roger's heavy breathing, showing that the boy still slept. With great care Dick raised himself until he could put his lips close to the other's ear, when he whispered:

"Roger, wake up, but keep very still! I am going to cut your bonds now!"

The boy gave a great start, but fortunately he did not attempt to answer. He comprehended instantly what the situation was, and knew the necessity for silence.

Already Dick's hands were seeking for the deerskin thongs that bound the wrists of his comrade to the tree. As soon as he had made certain, the pressure of the sharp blade instantly

severed the restraining cords and set Roger's hands free.

All that remained now was to do the same service with regard to the hide rope that went around Roger's waist, and then around his ankles further down. After that they could listen for a minute, to make sure they had not been heard, and then depart from the hostile camp on hands and knees, creeping stealthily along like a couple of snakes.

So far Dick's cleverly arranged plan had worked admirably. If the rest proved to be as easy of accomplishment they could congratulate themselves on having done a big thing, with credit to their education in the line of border cunning.

Dick had just finished severing the last of the bonds, and Roger was in the act of stepping forward, when something suddenly occurred that thrilled both boys to the heart, as well as put a different aspect on their method of hasty departure.

From some place back in the woods a little way a loud and singular whoop rang forth. Dick believed that it must be intended as a signal announcing an attack; for, hardly had it ceased to ring through the aisles of the forest, than a

deafening chorus of wild yells rang forth, together with the rush of many bodies crashing through the underwood and advancing from every direction toward the camp of the Dacotahs.

CHAPTER XVII

SHELTER IN A HOLLOW TREE

"IT is the Shoshone war-cry!" exclaimed Roger, instinctively, as he heard the piercing, bubbling sound that must have been uttered with a hand to the mouth.

Dick seized hold of his chum. He realized that any delay now might prove very costly for them both.

"We must get away from here!" he cried, thinking of what Roger had said concerning the savage ways of the Indians, and how they often preferred killing their prisoners to letting them be set free, or taken by a hostile tribe.

"Your gun, Dick?" asked Roger, breathlessly.

"I mean to make a grab for it," replied the other, who was already moving off.

Then it was that his careful survey of the surroundings came into play, for Dick had made a mental map upon which he could depend when utter darkness lay upon the earth.

Roger, still hearkening to the dreadful sounds

that were bursting out all about them, felt his companion duck down, and he judged that they must be alongside the log on which the gun with the ammunition had been placed by the Indian who had led them into the trap.

And, somehow, Roger guessed that success had come to his chum, even though he himself could not see anything of the gun. Again he was being half dragged along, as though Dick had chosen his course, and was trying to follow it.

Their one idea now was to get away from the camp, and let the hostile red men have their fight out to the bitter end. Small affair it was of the boys whether the Dacotahs whipped the Shoshones, or the latter overwhelmed the braves who had been the captors of the young pioneers.

Skillful maneuvering was necessary in order to avoid contact with any of the furious warriors. The boys heard the sound of blows being struck, and their lively imaginations could picture what was occurring nearby, as they slipped along through the darkness.

Fortune was kind to them, after all, for they did not strike against a single dusky figure, although several times they had to sink close to the ground when they heard the rush of moccasined feet close at hand.

Now the noise of the desperate hand-to-hand conflict was behind them, Roger noticed with a feeling of great relief. He could hear not only the war cries of those who fought, but occasionally there also came sounds of darker import, such as were probably the death chants of those who were bound for the "happy hunting grounds" of the red men. As they gradually put all this horrible clamor further and further behind them, the two boys felt their own spirits rise higher. The attack of the Shoshones had come just in the nick of time to help the young pioneers. It had served to cover their escape as nothing else could have done.

Roger was panting for breath, because of the excitement as well as his strenuous actions. He had knocked into more than one tree, but without so far seriously hurting himself; and as usual the boy felt that he must give tongue to the feelings of wild delight that were rioting through his veins.

- "We did it, Dick, for a fact; gave them the slip!" he burst forth.
 - "It looks that way, Roger."
 - "And now all we have to do is to get our bear-

ings, and make a fresh start for the river; isn't it?" continued Roger, anxiously.

"That's all, Roger," he was assured. "And already I feel that we are on the right course, so we'll keep along as we're going now."

"But the fight seems to be over with," added Roger. "At any rate all the yells have stopped. I wonder whether the Dacotahs whipped, or were overpowered by their foes? Though for that matter we care mighty little how it turned out."

"Since neither of them were our friends," Dick admitted, "we had no interest in the outcome of the forest battle. It was a case of dog eat dog with us; and I only hope we'll run across no more of the red rascals until we rejoin our party."

"How far do you mean to go before stopping, Dick?"

Roger was getting a little tired when he asked this question. They had both had a hard day of it, beside the standing for several hours in a cramped position tied to the trees.

"I think we ought to keep on for at least an hour more," Dick told him, "even if it does pull hard. By then we'll have reached a point where the Indians who turn out to be victors

can hardly find us in the morning, even if they happen to bother making the search. So keep up your spirits, Roger, for we've got a heap to be thankful for."

"I'm sure of that, Dick, and I hope you didn't think I was complaining just now. You'll find me good for an hour's tramp in the dark, or two of them, for that matter. Then for a few hours' sleep before day breaks."

"It may be the storm will swoop down on us before then, and force us to change our plans. So, after a while, we must keep a lookout for some sort of shelter, such as a hollow tree. It wouldn't be the first time we have lain in such a snug nook when the rain was coming down in bucketfuls."

"I should say it wasn't!" declared Roger, and from that time on he seemed to have picked up a new supply of energy, for he uttered no further complaint as he struggled on at the side of his companion.

No matter how slowly the minutes passed, Roger realized that the conditions were vastly different from what they seemed earlier in the night; when tied to that tree the gloom around him was no thicker than the state of his feelings. Dick finally came to a halt. Perhaps the hour had not fully passed, but he believed they had put enough ground behind them to feel safe. Besides, he had made a discovery that he fancied ought to be utilized.

Either the night had grown lighter, as though the moon might have arisen, and was shining back of the heavy clouds, or else the eyes of the boys, in growing accustomed to the darkness, allowed them to see things better.

"I've noticed several trees of good size as we came along, Roger," he told his chum; "and if only we can find one that is hollow, we need go no further until morning."

At that the other laughed as though pleased. "If that's all we need, Dick, how would this one over here do for our purposes?" and, speaking in this way, he directed the attention of his chum to a tree not far away.

It was an unusually big tree, and both of them could see, though a bit uncertainly, that it had some sort of cavity at its base. A hasty examination convinced them they had found just what they were looking for.

"We can creep in through that hole easily enough," said Roger, "because it's big enough for a giant to pass through. I hope though, Dick, it doesn't turn out to be the den of any wild beast."

"We can soon settle that!" declared Dick, as he took up a long stick, over which he had just tripped, and thrust it in through the opening.

As no sound of surly remonstrance followed this action on his part, it became evident that the hollow tree was not occupied by any animal.

"If it is a den there's nobody at home right now," announced Roger; "so we can crawl through the doorway and settle down."

After his customary impetuous fashion he insisted on being the one to lead the way, and was quickly inside the hollow tree.

"How do you find it?" asked Dick, thrusting his head through the opening.

"There seems to be plenty of room for two in here," was the quick reply; "and, although I don't just fancy the odor, still I think we could do worse, especially if it comes on to rain hard."

Upon hearing this Dick hastened to creep through the hole, carrying his gun with him of course. He had something on his mind, apparently, for hardly had he reached the side of the other boy than Dick thrust his gun into Roger's hands, remarking:

"I noticed an old stump just outside there,

and I'd better go and roll it up, so as to cover this opening, more or less."

"Then you must be thinking that some animal may come in here, and you mean to block the passage so we will not be taken by surprise; is that it?"

"Nothing less, Roger," Dick replied, as he started to crawl out again.

"If I can help you, let me know," called out Roger.

The stump did not prove to be very weighty, and Dick rolled it deftly so that it covered all but a small fraction of the opening. Then he crept inside, and the two of them had little trouble in closing most of the remainder of the aperture.

"Well, to tell you the honest truth," admitted Roger, when this undertaking had been completed, though plenty of air could still find ingress, "I do feel a whole lot better, now that we've shut the door. It can't be very pleasant to lie down to sleep in a hollow tree that may be a panther's lair, and to wake up to find the savage beast coming in on you."

Dick was as satisfied as his companion, even if less vociferous about it.

"I guess that stump will make a good enough

door," he went on to say, chuckling, "and if we wake up to hear some one knocking, we can ask who it is before we open up. Just as you say, it makes us feel more secure."

Satisfied with the way things were going Roger soon settled down to make himself as comfortable as the conditions allowed.

"Perhaps this isn't as sweet and easy a bed as my own at home," he remarked, after yawning several times; "but then, as my mother always says, beggars mustn't be choosers." And I can remember many a time when I've slept in worse places than a hollow tree."

"Remember before you go to sleep, Roger, it's understood that the one who happens to hear anything suspicious is to wake the other up. If you feel me touch you on the arm and hear me whisper, keep as still as a church mouse. It may mean that Indians are outside, and looking for us."

"I'll recollect, Dick, you can depend on it; and, if the tables should be turned, so that I am the one to get wind of the danger first, I'll do the same to you. So now, let's go to sleep."

Roger found very little trouble in putting his words into practice, and in a few minutes Dick heard him breathing heavily.

As he felt very much inclined that way himself, Dick made no effort to hold back sleep, and in a short time both lads were fast locked in slumber.

Some time passed, just how long neither of them really knew, when Dick felt a violent tug at his arm. He was wide-awake instantly, and understood just where he was, as well as what the jerk signified.

"What is it?" he whispered, as he felt for his gun the first thing, as though its touch would give him renewed confidence.

"Something or somebody is moving around outside, Dick," whispered Roger.

"Hist! listen!" remarked Dick, softly.

There was a slight scuffling sound, and the stump at the opening moved violently. Then came the loud sniffing of some animal that was trying to thrust its nose through a very small crevice and, apparently, could not understand why the door was closed.

"It must be a bear," said Dick, no longer keeping his voice confined to a whisper, but speaking aloud, "and this is his den. He wonders what has happened, and it may be he scents us, for he's trying to push his way in!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE STORM

Roger was considerably relieved when he heard his chum say this with so much confidence. A bear might be troublesome, but it was not to be compared with an Indian, for the latter was likely to have allies close at hand who could be summoned by a signal whoop.

"Do you think the beast can move the stump?" he asked Dick, at the same time feeling for his knife, which the other had turned over to Roger on discovering that it was really his property.

"He is trying hard to do so," replied Dick.

"Just listen how he keeps on sniffing at that crack," continued the other boy. "He knows that somebody has taken to his hollow tree, and he doesn't seem to like it at all. How about giving him a shot, Dick? At such close range you could easily knock him over."

Dick, however, had his own ideas about that. At least, he did not make any preparations for the shot.

"To tell you the truth, Roger," he finally explained, "I'd rather not waste my powder and ball on the old fellow. He'd be too tough for us to use as food, and besides, the sound of the report might bring some of the Indians down on us."

"I suppose you are right, Dick," commented Roger; "but it looks as if we might have to do something to frighten the bear away. There he starts again, trying to thrust the stump aside, and as sure as anything, Dick, the breach is getting a little wider every time he works at it."

"It seems so," agreed Dick, "and, as you say, we ought to do something to put a stop to his scratching and dragging. Wait a minute, I've an idea I can fix it!"

With these words he put his long rifle behind him so that it was safe in Roger's hands. In case of actual necessity the latter would know what to do with the fire-arm; but just then he was very curious to learn what Dick had arranged.

He could hear him moving, and he seemed to lean forward until his hands were perilously near the small opening at which the nose of the bear was working just as the snout of a hog might be used to move an obstacle. The champing of teeth, along with the loud sniffing, continued.

"What are you doing, Dick?" asked Roger, finally, unable to stand the suspense any longer.

"Oh!" came the cheery reply, "I have wasted a charge or two of powder, placing it as near the opening as I can, and running a thread this way. Now I have my flint and steel ready, and, as soon as he starts to poking his nose in at the hole again, I'll strike fire, and explode the powder in his face!"

Roger saw the object of this, and was considerably interested in the outcome.

"I hope he gets the full benefit of the flash," he observed.

Dick saw his chance just then, and he could be heard striking the flint and steel rapidly together after the manner of one whom long experience in this line had made almost perfect.

There came a little shower of descending sparks, and then a sudden brilliant flash that lit up the interior of the hollow tree as though the sun had found a means of ingress.

"Hurrah!" cried Roger, clapping his hands in glee, "that was the time you gave old Eph the scare of his life! Hear him plunging off, will you, Dick? It seems as if he'd lost all desire to make the acquaintance of his new lodgers. And I don't think we'll be bothered any more by Mr. Bear, do you?"

Dick also laughed softly as he replied:

"He must have had his nose singed that time, and got a bad fright in the bargain, so I reckon we'll not be annoyed again."

"This powder smoke is choking me, Dick."

"But it's slowly rising in the tree, and things are getting better right along," Roger was told. "We'll wait awhile until the air is purer, and after that we'll drag the old stump back to where it was before the bear moved it."

"And then?" queried Roger.

"Go to sleep again, if you feel like it, because we have some hours of the night still ahead of us," Dick calmly told him.

Before they could settle down they noticed that the wind was soughing through the trees with a louder note than before.

"That storm is coming closer all the while," remarked Dick, "and we needn't be surprised to hear thunder at any time now."

"If it does come," added Roger, sleepily, "we'll be glad to have such a fine shelter in the rain. But it may fool us after all, and for one I don't mean to lie awake waiting for it."

Dick, too, managed to get to sleep before a great while. Both of them were presently aroused by a loud crash of thunder.

"Why, it did get here after all, Dick!" exclaimed Roger, the first thing.

"Listen and you can hear the rain further along beating down on the forest trees. One good thing about it is that the storm will probably not be a long one."

Dick's words were immediately followed by a vivid flash of lightning, and then came another loud detonation that seemed to shake the earth.

In these present days two wide-awake boys who had picked up some knowledge of woodcraft would be very much alarmed to find themselves in a hollow tree during an electrical storm, knowing that there was always a chance of the lightning's striking such an object and bringing about their destruction.

Dick and Roger were not worried on that point. Perhaps it was because they were accustomed to taking hazards; or it may have sprung from ignorance of the danger.

However, the hollow tree had lost its top long years ago, and was surrounded by loftier trees so the chances of its being struck were not serious. Then the rain came, and, from the sounds that reached their ears, the boys decided that it was almost a tropical downpour. Roger was on the alert to discover whether their shelter was going to prove its worth, or begin to leak. After some time had passed he voiced his conviction in his usual fashion.

"Not a drop so far, Dick, and I believe we're going to keep dry jackets through the whole downpour. Why, this is better than being in one of the tents, for they nearly always let a stream of water trickle down your neck when you're not expecting it. I think we're mighty lucky to have such good shelter."

"And I agree with every word you say, Roger," his companion added.

"How is the night going, do you know?" continued the other.

"I'm sure I can hardly say, Roger. At a guess I might venture to say that we may have something like two hours more of darkness."

"Then all I hope is the storm will peter out before dawn, so we can start for the river right away. We ought to come upon the expedition by evening, unless we get lost, and that is something not likely to happen to boys like us, who have lived in the woods since they were kneehigh to grasshoppers."

"One thing sure, we have had all the sleep we're going to get to-night," Dick remarked.

"It seems to me the rain has slackened some. At least, it doesn't make such a terrible noise when it strikes the trees. But there was a pretty lively wind blowing, Dick, and I think I heard more than one tree crash down before the gale."

"Yes," added the other. "And this old wreck did some groaning, too. Once I was in a sweat thinking it might go toppling over; but the other trees must have protected it some, for it stood through the wild storm."

When Roger hazarded the opinion that the gale was abating he spoke the truth, for in a short time it became manifest that the thunder came from a more distant point, the lightning was not so brilliant, and the rain itself began to fall more lightly.

In fact, things took on such a different tone that Roger actually settled himself down to try for a little more sleep.

Dick had been too thoroughly aroused to think of doing this. He continued to sit there, keeping a vigil on the crack, through which he knew he would catch the first glimpse of breaking day. He amused himself while sitting thus by letting his thought go back to the happy home far down the "Big Muddy," where his father and his mother, his little brother Sam, and his grand-parents besides, occupied the big cabin in the clearing, close to the one where Roger's parents lived.

Finally, Dick discovered that it was no longer pitch dark outside. The moon had broken out from the scattering storm clouds, and was giving a fair amount of light.

Dick, always in touch with the positions of the heavenly bodies, knew, after he had located the fragment of a moon, that morning was indeed close at hand. Indeed, he believed that in less than half an hour the dawn would break.

He allowed Roger to sleep until it was broad daylight, and then, acting under the belief that they had better be on their way, he laid a hand on the other's arm.

"Morning has come, and we ought to be getting out of here," Dick told his comrade, as he felt the other move under his touch.

"Why, I did go to sleep after all, it seems," muttered Roger, as though he considered this the queerest thing of all; but Dick only smiled,

for he knew of old some of the little weaknesses of his chum.

They succeeded in pushing the old stump away from the opening, leaving a gap big enough for them to crawl through.

"If Mr. Bear ever takes the trouble to come back to his den," remarked Roger, as he surveyed the big tree with its hollow butt, "he's welcome to his old quarters. I'd like to tell him that his hole is all right, too, when a fellow is caught in a storm; but we have other fish to fry just now."

His words reminded him of the fine mess of trout they had caught on the preceding day, just before the trap set by the cunning Indians had been sprung, and shortly afterwards he remarked:

"I do hope our friends found all the strings of trout we left along the bank of that stream; and that there were more than they could use at one time. It would be fine if we got a taste of the same, Dick, after all this fuss."

"I was just thinking," remarked practical Dick, who certainly was not bothering his head about trout, or any other kind of food, "that, after all, that storm may have done us one kindness."

"Tell me how, then?" demanded Roger, who failed to agree with him until he could be shown the facts.

"The rain must have washed all our tracks out, so not even the sharpest-eyed Indian brave could follow our trail," explained the other, and of course Roger found himself in full accord with the theory advanced, for, like the story of Columbus and the envious Spanish courtiers, things looked very different after the explanation.

With a last backward look toward the friendly old tree that had afforded them shelter in the storm, the two lads tightened their belts and set off on their long tramp, expecting to strike the bank of the Missouri by the time the sun was ready to set.

CHAPTER XIX

UNDER THE FALLEN FOREST MONARCH

"THERE! that makes the fourth tree I've seen blown down in the storm," remarked Roger, after they had been walking through the forest for some time.

"Yes, and in every case if you went to the trouble to examine those trees," he was told by Dick, "you would find that they were rotten at the heart. They may keep on standing up with the rest, and seem to be perfect, but when the wind sweeps through the forest it searches out the weak and imperfect trees, and topples them over."

"That must be what grandfather means when he talks about the 'survival of the fittest,'" Roger mused. "He says that Nature knows what is best for everything, and keeps thinning out the weak ones along every line."

"Then there must have been a lot of poor trash over yonder," chuckled Dick, "for I can see a number of trees down." "Oh! what was that?" suddenly asked Roger.

"It sounded to me like a groan," his companion admitted, as both of them stood still in order to listen.

"There it comes again, Dick, and, just as you said, it must be a groan. I wonder if any one could have been caught under a tree when it fell?"

"We must be cautious how we move forward," was Dick's advice, "because we know the treacherous nature of these Indians."

"Do you mean it might turn out to be a trap?" demanded Roger.

"There is always a chance of that, so, while we make our way in that direction, we must be ready to run if we discover any lurking reds about."

Dick also kept his rifle in readiness in case of a sudden emergency. It might be a shot would check a rush on the part of their enemies, and thus enable the boys to get a fair start.

Guided by the groans, which now came louder and more frequently, they were not long in making a discovery.

"Dick, I see him!" exclaimed Roger, in fresh excitement; "and, sure enough, he is caught in the branches of that big tree over there. It

isn't a trap after all, but some one in trouble."

"And an Indian at that, Roger," added the other, as he, too, managed to catch a glimpse of the unfortunate one.

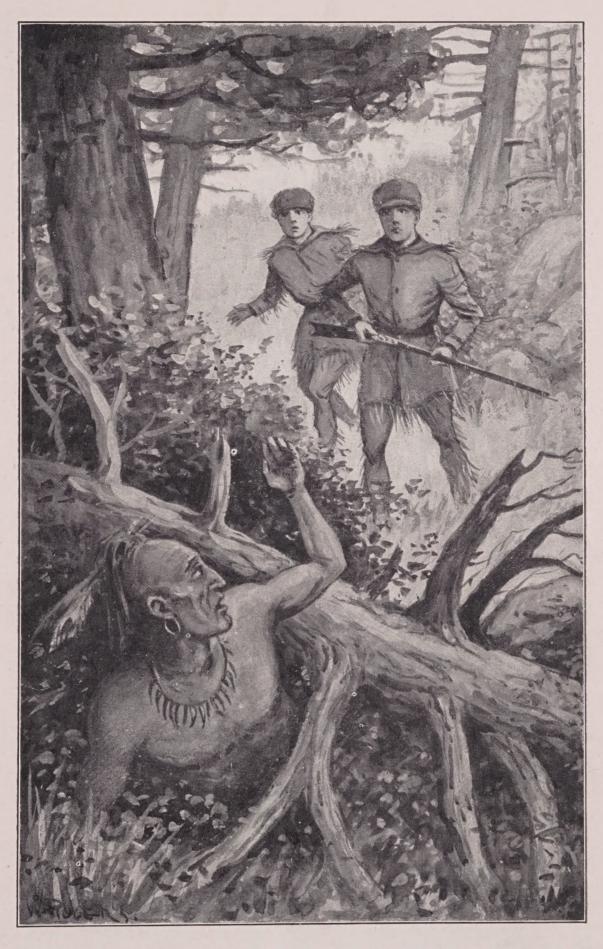
"Will that make any difference; or do you think he may be just shamming?" asked Roger, hesitating.

"There is no mistake about his being in a bad fix," ventured Dick. "He may not be terribly hurt, but the tree has pinned him down, you can see; and if we left the poor fellow there he would either starve to death or else be devoured by the wild beasts."

"Oh! we never could have the heart to do that," asserted Roger, who possessed a generous nature, like all his headstrong class.

They pushed forward, and were soon at the fallen tree. The Indian must have discovered their presence, for he had ceased groaning, as though too proud to show any sign of cowardice. A brave would sooner have his hand cut off than be reckoned timid or weak.

"How are we going to get him out of that trap?" Roger remarked, after they had looked the situation over. "We have no hatchet for cutting the limb, and my knife would never do the job in a day."



"THEY PUSHED FORWARD, AND WERE SOON AT THE FALLEN TREE"



"He's held down as if in a vise," Dick observed thoughtfully, "and I can see only one way of getting him loose. Let me have your knife and I'll hack my way in close to him. There seems to be just one avenue open for that."

Roger, filled with curiosity, watched his cousin set to work. He could readily understand how the other intended to reach the side of the imprisoned brave, but just what means he expected to use in order to free the warrior Roger was unable to guess.

A short time afterwards Dick had gained the side of the brave, to whom he spoke a few words; and, doubtful whether he was understood, these were supplemented by various reassuring gestures.

Then, to the astonishment of Roger, Dick started to dig furiously in the ground. At first his intentions were a mystery to Roger, who wrinkled his brow as he looked on. All at once, however, he grasped the idea.

"Now I can see what you're up to, Dick," he called out; "and I must say it looks like a winning scheme. All you have to do is to dig under the brave, and let him sink down a little. Then, when the pressure of those limbs grows

less, he can either squirm out himself, or be dragged forth."

That, in fact, was the idea Dick had conceived in his fertile brain. He continued to delve away with a steady purpose in view, and presently it could be seen that he was making an impression on the earth. The trapped Indian brave began to sink downward by slow degrees until finally the pressure had relaxed to such an extent that by making a great effort, and assisted by Dick, he managed to wriggle out from under the limbs of the fallen tree.

He had been hurt in various places, though Dick did not believe any of his wounds were really serious. Accustomed, as they were, to treating injuries, it was only natural for the boys to make up their minds that they would do something for the poor fellow.

When Dick made motions to this effect, the Indian allowed them to do what they willed, although he watched every movement with eyes that were filled with curiosity.

"I wonder whether he's more surprised at seeing us have this soothing ointment mother made along with us, or that 'palefaces' should go to such trouble just for an Indian?" Roger remarked, as he assisted in the work. (Note 6.)

"It doesn't matter much which affects him most," said Dick, calmly, "we are doing just what our parents have taught us to do. Besides, how can we tell whether this brave is an enemy or a friend?"

"They say an Indian never forgets an injury, or an act of kindness," ventured Roger; "and, if that is true, we can count on one friend among the Dacotahs, for I'm sure he belongs to that tribe."

"Yes, he is a Dacotah, but they all look alike to me, so I couldn't say whether he was among those who captured us or not. He seems to be listening to what we are saying, and I really believe he half understands our talk. Perhaps he knows a little English, for there have been white trappers who have penetrated this far."

"Suppose you try him, and see if he can understand, Dick?"

"I mean to do that," was the reply, "because I'd like to put a spoke in the wheel of that revengeful Andrew Waller. He has told these foolish Indians we are the sons of the Great White Father at Washington, and that if we were held as prisoners a mighty ransom would be paid for our release. We must convince the

reds that it is false, and that we are only ordinary white boys."

This idea held some weight with Dick, and after completing his work in connection with the brave's wounds he commenced the attempt to talk with him.

At first it looked as though there would be little chance of success; but after a little he succeeded in getting the painted brave to understand what he was trying to explain. This was done by means of single words, accompanied by much gesturing and pointing.

If the Indian had not already known about the boys, and what was said about their being the sons of the White Father he could never have understood matters at all. Gradually Dick began to believe he was hammering the facts into the head of the other. He saw a light as of comprehension dawning on his painted face.

"I do believe you've managed to pound it into his brain, Dick," said Roger, who had been an earnest witness of all this. "He looks as if he knew what you wanted him to do. See, he even nods his head when you speak."

Dick felt that he had reason to be proud of what he had done. To get an Indian, who could

not talk English beyond a few words, to understand that they were only ordinary, every-day boys instead of the important personages Andrew Waller had pictured, was a triumph indeed.

"I am asking him to pass the news along, and spread it far and wide," explained Dick, as he continued his gestures and forceful words; "and I think he knows. Here, let me do a little picture writing for him; perhaps that may help."

He picked up a piece of smooth bark, and, using the point of Roger's hunting knife, managed to scratch several crude designs upon it. Two of these represented the rising and the setting sun. Then a figure with a Dacotah head-dress stood half way between with arms outstretched.

Showing this to the brave, Dick once more began to speak and make gestures. While he could not of course be certain, still he had every reason to believe that the other understood what he was driving at, for he nodded, touched each of the boys on the chest, then shook his head in the negative, and said something in the Dacotah tongue which Dick fancied meant White Father.

"That's the best I can do with him, Roger;

and now we must be on our way again. Whether it works or not, at least we can feel that we have done the right thing."

CHAPTER XX

THE RETURN FROM CAPTIVITY

THEY parted from the Dacotah brave with what was doubtless intended to be grateful gestures on his part.

"He seems to understand that we have played the part of friends," said Roger, "and I think if the chance ever comes up he will stand by us."

"I am of the same opinion," declared Dick, "though for that matter I hope we may never need his help. After all, we did not lose much time, and it was worth while to save a life."

They pushed on diligently for a long time. Dick was not in doubt as to his course, for he had taken particular pains to notice as they came along on the preceding day, in the company of the Indians.

When Roger happened to ask once if he were quite sure the river lay directly ahead of them, Dick answered confidently.

"Unless it makes a great sweep to the north somewhere above us we will run upon the river by nightfall, take my word for it;" and Roger, accustomed to depending fully on his comrade, never doubted after that moment.

Something else was soon upon his mind, however, and he voiced his thoughts by appealing to Dick.

"Do you think it would be dangerous if you shot your gun off just once, in case we sighted some game? I feel very hungry, for that supper the Indians gave us didn't seem to do me much good. And breakfast is one of my best meals, you know."

Dick laughed at seeing the appealing look on his chum's face.

"I don't think the danger of the shot's being heard is one-half as great as you think you are of starving to death," he told Roger.

"Then you agree, do you?" demanded the other, eagerly. "I'll keep my eyes peeled for sight of a deer, and I do hope it isn't going to be long before we get a chance at one."

As luck would have it, before another ten minutes had passed the opportunity he was hoping for came their way. Dick was ready, and with the report of his gun a yearling doe fell in a heap, just when in the act of plunging into the dense thicket.

Of course Roger would not think of any delay

in getting a fire going and some of the tender meat broiling before the flames. While he looked after the fire Dick cut up the game, and it was not long before an appetizing odor began to make both boys wishful for the feast to begin.

"We can make up for this stop," said Roger as he sat there devouring piece after piece of the half-cooked venison, "by not halting at noon for a rest. Then again, we can hurry our steps at times and so get along faster."

"No trouble about that," Dick assured him, "for I figure that we have plenty of time to get there by dark. You remember that we were only on the move some six hours yesterday, and we have the whole of to-day for tramping."

"Do you know, Dick, this reminds me of how we chased after the expedition for weeks and weeks when determined to find Jasper Williams, and get that paper signed for our parents. Hundreds of miles we followed the trail as it ascended the Missouri River, until at last we overtook them."

"What we did once we can do again, this time on a small scale," Dick assured him. "I was just watching those crows over there in that

¹ See "The Pioneer Boys of the Missouri."

tree-top. They seem to be holding a regular caucus, and keep on scolding like everything."

"Yes," added the other boy, "and sometimes crows turn out to be a pest in lots of ways besides eating the settler's corn. Old hunters have told me they hide from crows whenever they find themselves in hostile territory, because through their cawing the birds tell the Indians strangers are in the woods."

"There, the whole lot has flown away, and making all sorts of noises in the bargain," Dick went on to say. "I don't like crows myself any too much. They are too noisy, and seem to think every one is trying to creep up on them for a shot."

"When we do strike the river, Dick, can we easily tell whether the expedition has passed or not?"

"All we have to do is to examine the ground, for their horses would leave a plain trail, you know, Roger."

"And if, after searching, we do not find any sign, we will know they haven't come along yet. In that case all we have to do will be to sit down, and take things easy until they show up."

Roger seemed to have left most of his troubles behind, after making a good breakfast on the deer meat. With the intention of chiding him for displaying any eagerness for food when there was none to be had, Dick took up the subject again as they trudged manfully onward.

"It's very plain to be seen that you'd never make a good Indian brave, Roger," was what he told the other, and this excited the boy's curiosity just as Dick knew would be the case.

"Tell me why," he demanded. "I always thought I could stand pain without flinching as well as any Indian boy; and I've learned a lot about wild life in the bargain. Where do I fall short, Dick?"

"It's just this way," his cousin told him. "An Indian boy is taught never to display his feelings, no matter what he suffers inwardly. If he were struck by a poisonous rattlesnake, and could feel his body swelling, not a whimper would come from his lips."

"Well, what has that to do with me, Dick? So far I have never been attacked by a rattle-snake, though I've killed plenty of the ugly 'varmints,' I wager."

"But you did put on a long face, and you complained because for once you missed your breakfast. Now, an Indian boy would never have said a word, but held in grimly to the end. Not that I blame you, remember, for I was hungry myself, and ready to use my gun, even before you mentioned it."

They both laughed at that.

"We were born 'paleface' boys," said Roger,
"and it's hard for the leopard to change its
spots, they say. When we're hungry we know
it, yes, and we don't mind letting other people
know it, too, if that will help things along."

Noon came and went.

They kept persistently moving forward. Occasionally they came to open places in the forest where the grass grew green, and often did they glimpse deer feeding in these glades. Once they even saw a small herd of buffaloes trooping off, having apparently winded the boys.

But Dick made no motion to use his gun again. They had all the fresh meat they required, and powder and balls were too precious to be needlessly wasted. So the afternoon came and found them keeping up that determined pace. If either of them felt tired they failed to mention the fact, which in itself was pretty positive evidence that they possessed many of the best traits of the Indian character, after all.

From long habit they were accustomed to such exercise as this, and would not have complained

had the tramp kept up far into the coming night.

It was about the middle of the afternoon when Roger gave a low exclamation of delight.

"I can see the river ahead of us, Dick!" he cried, with a vein of deep satisfaction in his voice.

"Yes, I have been waiting to hear you say that, Roger, for I glimpsed it five minutes back. So you see after all we have made good time. We shall be there long before sunset."

"I must say I am glad to know it," Roger admitted; and then hastily added: "Not that I doubted your word a bit, but then, 'seeing is believing,' you know, Dick."

"Yes, and, confident as I was myself, I am relieved to see the river glimmering in the sunlight before us," Dick frankly admitted.

"It can hardly be more than two miles or so away from here, wouldn't you say?" questioned Roger, always ready to have any assertion he might make backed up by the word of his chum, in whom he had such positive faith.

"About that," the other told him, as they once more started ahead.

When finally they stood on the high bank of the river, no longer the mighty stream they knew it down near their home, and looked at the opposite shore, the sun was still more than an hour high.

"Now to find out if they have passed by, and whether we will have to keep on up the river," said Dick, as he began to look about him.

A brief search convinced them that no horses had passed that point. They saw the marks of deer, and buffaloes, as well as some very large imprints made by cloven hoofs, that startled the boys, for they did not know what sort of strange animal had made them; but it was sure that horses had not been present.

"That settles it then," said Roger, with a sigh of relief, for he would much rather just sit there and wait for the expedition to come along, than be compelled to follow for miles after it.

"We will make camp here to-night if they fail to show up," asserted Dick, which piece of information pleased Roger, his pleasure showing in the broad smile of contentment that broke over his face.

With plenty of good venison to last them through many days, what need had they to worry? They knew the exploring party bound for the other side of the mountains was sure to come along, sooner or later; when they could once more join their good friends, and take

their accustomed places as though nothing unusual had happened.

Dick selected a certain spot on which to settle and wait for the exploring party. In doing this he had in mind the fact that it afforded them a clear view down the river. A bend lay just a quarter of a mile below their position, around which they could expect the boats to appear, sooner or later.

Lying at their ease the boys talked of many things as they awaited the coming of the expedition. Their recent experience of course came in for a good share of attention, for it still thrilled them to compare notes of the night attack, when those hideous whoops were ringing in their ears, together with the heavy percussion of blows as the fierce Shoshones invaded the camp of the Dacotahs and struggled hand to hand for the supremacy.

The sun was sinking lower and lower, so that it really began to look as though, after all, the boys would have to make camp where they were. Apparently the expedition had spent some little time looking for the lost ones, and Dick had struck the river further up than they had as yet penetrated.

Suddenly Roger discovered a moving object

down the river. Then, around the bend, a boat came in sight, in which they could see white men, some of them soldiers.

At the same time voices from the shore reached their ears, and they caught fugitive glimpses of moving figures advancing along a buffalo trail close to the edge of the bank. These latter they realized must be the party mounted on the horses, and who always kept near the boats for mutual protection and company.

"That settles it then, Dick. We will not have to camp by ourselves to-night; and, after all, I'm glad of it. Not that I don't enjoy being off with you alone, but up here, so far away from the settlements, it makes me feel better to know I am in company with some dozens of other whites."

"I think there's still another reason why you are glad they are coming," ventured Dick, shrewdly; "you keep on hoping they may not have devoured all of those fine trout we caught yesterday, and that you can still have a chance to taste some of them."

Roger would neither admit nor deny the accusation, but only laughed and prepared to wave his cap toward the men in the leading boat a minute later. It could be seen that quite some excitement followed the discovery that the two missing boys were above, waiting for the boats to arrive. Voices were heard conveying the intelligence to the other boats, and loud shouts attested to the fact that the men rejoiced over the safe return of the lost ones.

The spot offered very good accommodations for stopping over night, and so, upon arriving opposite the lads, the boats made for the shore. Dick and Roger soon found themselves being heartily greeted by all their good friends. Most of the men had really given them up for lost when they learned the fact that they had been carried off by the Dacotahs, after being so treacherously led into a trap by the seemingly friendly brave who had loitered so long about the camp.

The two captains were among the first to shake the hands of the pioneer boys, and assure them of their deep satisfaction at seeing them again. Of course every one was anxious to know what had happened to them, and the boys were compelled to tell their story again and again as the tents were being pitched and preparations made for the night camp.

It was admitted by all that they had been ex-

ceedingly lucky. At the same time, every one knew that the boys deserved great credit for their clever escape from the hands of the Dacotahs. Dick had planned it all very cleverly so as to make their escape possible even though there had been no midnight attack on the part of the Shoshones, though, of course, they might have been followed and had further trouble.

As darkness set in, the bustling scene gave the two lads much pleasure and contentment. They could not but compare this night with the one that had gone just before, when they had sat in the midst of their dusky captors, not knowing what lay in store for them in the near future.

No sooner was supper set before them than Roger turned a beaming face toward Dick, as he voiced his feelings of delight.

"You see, they didn't make way with those fish after all, Dick, because they were not found until late in the evening. So they just cleaned and salted them down, and we're to have the greatest treat you ever tasted to-night. It sometimes pays to wait patiently for things to come along," and, seeing Dick smiling, he winked knowingly, after which he bustled off to watch the process by means of which the fish were to be prepared for the coming meal.

CHAPTER XXI

AT THE FOOT OF THE ROCKIES

"The time is coming, and very soon at that, I guess, Dick, when we must expect a great change in our going."

Roger made this remark some two weeks after their adventure with the rascally Dacotahs, who had been misled by the false words of Andrew Waller. All this while the whites had been steadfastly pushing farther and farther up the narrowing Missouri, until navigation had become very difficult.

"Yes, I know what you mean by that," remarked Dick. "Every day now we are having more and more trouble with the batteaux. They get aground so often that much valuable time is wasted in freeing them."

"It looks as if we might be nearly at the headwaters of the Missouri, the river is getting so shallow," Roger observed.

"That is probably partly due to the time of year," explained Dick. "We are well along in August, you must remember, and the snow doesn't melt as easily up in the mountain can-

yons now as it did earlier in the season. Besides, we have had little heavy rain, if you stop to think."

"What do you expect Captain Lewis will do, Dick?"

"I heard him saying only to-day, when they were working at the boat which stuck on the shoal, that it looked as though the limit had been reached. You understand what that means, of course, Roger?"

"I believe I do," was the reply. "From what I've picked up here and there it appears to be the plan to leave part of the expedition in camp somewhere along the upper reaches of the Missouri until next year, while the rest make a dash for the Coast on the horses."

"It was fixed," continued Dick, "that Captain Clark should lead the party headed for the sea; but I have heard since that Captain Lewis has changed his mind. He doesn't feel like being cheated out of that glorious sight after all he has passed through."

"And who can blame him?" burst out the impetuous Roger. "I only hope they let us keep along with them. We have a horse apiece, you know, and could easily hold our own when it came to hunting for game."

"Captain Lewis promised that we should set eyes on the sea if any one in the party did, and he is a man of his word, you know."

"I should never get over the disappointment," declared Roger, "if anything prevented us from keeping on to the end. We have made great sacrifices in order to be in the company. Besides, I am fairly burning to set eyes on some of the many wonders we expect to meet with in crossing the big mountains of rock. The Indians have kept telling us about strange animals to be encountered there."

"Those mountains," Dick went on to say, "are the home of the terrible brown bear which Captain Lewis has called the grizzly. We know how they can fight, because we had an experience in a cave with one that we're not likely ever to forget."

"Yes," added Roger, "and according to the Indians' way of doing, we're entitled to wear those dreadful claws around our necks, after slaying the monster at close quarters. Whenever you run across an Indian with the claws of a grizzly bear worn as a necklace you can count on it that he's proved his right to the name of warrior.

¹ See "The Pioneer Boys of the Yellowstone."

"Then we've also heard of a beast living among the crags of these mountains that has immense curved horns, upon which he alights after throwing himself from some lofty height. That may be only a fairy story, but I'd like to see for myself if there's any truth in it.

"As for me, Dick, I've already made up my mind that I'll shoot one of those queer beasts, and get a sample of the curved horns, if ever the chance comes my way. Just yesterday I was thinking of the wonderful tracks we saw when we were having that adventure with the Dacotahs, and hoping that some of these fine days we might come upon the animal that made them."

"I have tried my best, Roger, to learn what the beast looks like, and the nearest any Indian has been able to tell is that once in a while a monster of the deer tribe is seen in these regions. None of the trappers in our party have an idea what it can be, save Batiste, who declares he has shot just such a great beast up in Canada."

"Then he must mean a moose!" exclaimed Roger, looking intensely interested. "Come to think of it now, I don't see why a moose might not wander over here. They live only in cold

countries, I am told, but in the winter it must be bitter enough up here to please any one."

Just as the boys had said, when talking matters over between themselves, the river had become so shallow that it was folly to try to push the heavy batteaux any further up the current.

Accordingly, a permanent camp was to be established on the river bank, where a part of the men would be left in as comfortable circumstances as the conditions permitted. Here they were to stay until they were rejoined the following summer by the returning explorers, after they had been to the Coast.

Those who were to be left behind were to establish relations and make friends with the neighboring Indian tribes, serve them as physicians, and do what hunting was necessary.

Of course the scene in the camp that night was an unusual one. The men who were to accompany the two captains had been advised of their good fortune, and, while they showed signs of pleasure, at the same time they knew that the final stages of the big journey would be filled with peril, so, in one way, they really envied those who could stay behind in comfort and peace.

There was an air of half-suppressed excite-

ment throughout the camp as the men conferred together, exchanged some of their possessions, and in numerous ways made ready for the parting that was coming so soon.

Captain Lewis did not have many preparations to make, for all along he and his able ally had seen that everything was kept at the highest notch of efficiency.

"I really do believe," said Roger, as he and his chum sat watching the many sights of the camp that evening, "that Captain Lewis has planned for every little thing that could happen; and whoever is left in charge here will know what he is to do from day to day, just as if he got his orders fresh from headquarters."

"That is partly the result of having a man like Captain Clark along," explained Dick. "He believes in method, and carries his ideas out as a military man should. Captain Lewis could not have found a better companion for his venture than he did."

"It is settled that we are to go along with them, of course?" fretted Roger, who knew perfectly well that this matter had been arranged, but wanted to hear his comrade say so.

"We have the word of the commander for it, and that ought to be enough, Roger."

One whole day they spent in the camp by the river so that nothing should be neglected. Then, on the following morning, bright and early the good-bys were said, and the little party, mounted on the horses, set out to plunge still deeper into the unknown wilderness toward the glittering prize that tempted them—the sun-kissed sea that lay far away over mountains and across burning deserts.

It was only natural that every one should be more or less affected over the parting. None of them could tell what the future held. Surrounded by a trackless wilderness, many hundreds of miles from a single white man's village, and with treacherous savages to deal with, the chances of their ever coming together again seemed very remote.

During that day both the boys were inclined to be unusually quiet and thoughtful. Indeed, for that matter, every one of the riders seemed to have lost his ordinary spirits, although, of course, this feeling of depression would soon wear away, and by degrees the men would learn to face the situation bravely.

It was evident to every one that the party was now approaching the foothills of those great mountains of which so much had been heard. Captain Lewis knew that, in order to cross them with as little hard work as possible, they must head for a pass of which they had been told by some of the Indians. Unless they could find this, their efforts would be in vain, and they must turn back, defeated in their daring plans.

Three days after leaving their comrades the advancing party came to a good camping ground early in the afternoon, and, as the horses were really in need of a rest, it was concluded to stop here for the night.

This was an opportunity the two boys had been waiting for, and they had little difficulty in getting permission from the commander to indulge themselves in a short hunt.

The camp was in need of fresh meat, though not desperately so; and if only a deer could be taken it would afford them a few good meals. Captain Lewis, knowing Roger's headstrong ways, took particular pains to caution them before they set out.

"See that you take no unnecessary chances, my boys," was what he had said. "We would be very sorry, indeed, to have to bear your parents bad news when next we see St. Louis. But I feel that, so long as Dick is along, you will be careful. And, if you can bring the carcass of

a young deer back with you, so much the better."

It was a fine afternoon in late summer. There did not seem to be any sign of stormy weather in prospect, from which fact the boys felt sure they would not be compelled to look for a hollow tree as before.

First of all they were wise enough to take their bearings, for they certainly did not want to lose themselves in the vast wilderness, since they could no longer depend on finding their friends by simply hunting for the river.

Then the next thing was to hunt up into the wind. This was, of course, done so that if they were approaching some keen-nosed game the animal might not scent their presence, and depart before they could get a chance to fire a single shot.

It was a wild section of country. They could see, beyond, the mighty barrier of mountains that stood between them and their goal. The woods were composed of scrub trees, with openings here and there; though in most sections, east of the chain of mountains, prairie land existed.

From where they looked up to the dizzy heights, the sides of the mountains seemed bleak

and rocky. They had been told, however, that on the western slope vegetation grew plentifully, as the winds from the ocean brought much rain, though little of this crossed the divide.

The boys pursued their hunt for nearly an hour without coming upon any game, although they saw plenty of signs of it, and were always counting on making a discovery. Versed in forest lore, they knew how to creep along without making any sound likely to give warning of their approach.

All conversation had been tabooed long since, for even Roger knew that an incautious word might spoil their plans, and give the unseen deer notice of their presence in the vicinity.

It was while they were thus moving along that Dick suddenly thrust out a hand and drew his companion to a standstill. Roger turned his head quickly, as though he did not comprehend what this meant, only to see Dick's finger pressed on his lips to indicate silence.

At the same moment Roger himself caught the low thud of hoofs. Some animal was certainly approaching them, and the singular "clicking" that accompanied each thud told them the beast must have cloven hoofs like those of a deer. A few seconds passed during which the strange sounds grew louder, and then, as the bushes parted, the two boys gazed upon a sight such as had never before greeted their astonished eyes.

CHAPTER XXII

THE DEATH OF THE BULL MOOSE

SEEN for the first time in all their experience as hunters of big game, the animal that stood there facing the two boys was remarkable enough to arouse their interest to fever pitch.

Tawny of hue, and possessing an enormous muzzle, together with towering horns, the giant moose filled Roger with a sense of exaltation. The hunter instinct within the boy set his heart to beating like a trip-hammer, and his fingers involuntarily gripped his gun, his first instinct being to make use of the weapon.

The moose evidently did not suspect their presence nearby. So far as appearances went, the big, awkward animal was showing no signs of alarm.

Roger hastily threw his rifle up to his shoulder, and, without bothering to take exact aim, pulled the trigger. He never really knew why he did not drop the beast as he expected to do. It might be because this weapon did not com-

pare with his own, which had been carried off by the treacherous Andrew Waller at the time the two boys were prisoners of the Dacotahs.

Dick, however, believed that the moose bull must have made an involuntary movement just about that time. Roger's hasty action, or the glint of the sun on the gun barrel, would be enough to bring such a thing about.

The one important fact was that, instead of killing his intended quarry on the spot, Roger had the chagrin of seeing the animal stumble and fall, to scramble immediately to his feet again, and make a vicious plunge forward in their direction.

Dick of course knew that it was his duty to get in the fatal shot. He thrust his rifle forward, and had it not been for an unfortunate movement on the part of his companion his bullet would have finished the monster.

In jumping back, however, Roger happened to knock against the leveled rifle just as his chum pressed the trigger. The result was a wasted bullet, and, with both their weapons empty and useless, a serious outlook faced the two young hunters.

"Jump to one side!" shouted Dick, realizing

that the enraged moose was charging them, with lowered head, and threatening horns.

Both boys threw themselves back, and in this manner successfully avoided the passing danger.

They knew that a wounded stag is often a peril from which even veteran hunters shrink; and it stood to reason that this enormous animal, feeling the pain of his injury, would not run away in a hurry after having made one unsuccessful charge.

Both boys glanced hastily around, seeking a tree behind which to ward off an attack. Dick was fortunate enough to find one close at hand, but Roger met with his usual ill luck to start with.

The moose, as though sensing which one of his enemies had given him that burning injury, took after Roger, and the boy, hearing the trampling of his hoofs as he came rushing on, became a little confused.

"Run, Roger, run faster!" shrilled Dick, who began to fear for the safety of his cousin.

There were surely grounds for his alarm, for, just at that moment, Roger caught his foot in some trailing vine and plunged forward. With wonderful adroitness, however, the border boy

managed to regain his feet, and face the oncoming moose bull.

It was too late for him to continue his flight, and there did not seem to be even time enough for the boy to scramble out of harm's way. Dick's heart burned within him with fear. He would have given everything he possessed in the wide world if just then his gun were only loaded and primed, ready for use.

Roger, however, saw that there was immediate need for action, and he took a strange way of meeting the occasion. Dick, staring at the scene, saw his chum suddenly leap toward the oncoming moose bull. He actually flung himself upon that great, lowered head, falling between the towering horns, and hastened to clasp his arms about the animal's thick neck.

This act plainly greatly astonished the beast, and he stood stock still for a brief interval.

Dick's one fear was that the moose should set off at a lumbering pace through the woods, and bring up against some tree with such force as to break the sprawling legs of the clinging boy. He himself was trying in a confused fashion to get a charge of powder down the barrel of his gun, instinct telling him that, once he managed to reload the weapon, the game would be in his hands.

Now the moose was trying to dislodge Roger by tossing up his head. Each time he made the effort Dick held his breath in suspense, for the boy's hold was precarious, and might give way at any moment. It was apparently the intention of the bull to shake him loose in this way, and, after the boy dropped back to the ground, to trample him underfoot before he could recover sufficiently to get out of the way.

Sometimes strange things happen in cases like this. The moose must have put an additional amount of energy into one of his tosses, for Dick suddenly saw Roger's form rising several yards in the air, and crash amidst the leaves of the tree under which this performance was taking place.

The moose waited for the fall of his enemy in order to use those cruel hoofs of his in the final attack. But, remarkable to say, Roger did not come down, and Dick suddenly realized that his nimble chum had taken advantage of his lofty flight to lay hold of the branches of the tree, and to cling there as best he could.

Dick felt like giving vent to a shout when he realized that, so far as Roger was concerned, the

danger could be considered over. He was now reaching for a patched bullet, and hoped with his ramrod to push it quickly home on the powder, when he would be ready, all but the priming, to make good use of his rifle.

Roger saw what was going on so close by, and commenced kicking with his feet, and letting out a few derisive shouts, aimed at the waiting moose below. He intended to hold the attention of the bulky animal so Dick could have all the time he needed to get the gun loaded.

The plan worked splendidly, for the stupid animal below kept steady vigil under the limb where all that thrashing was going on. He snorted with rage, and pawed the earth with one of his hoofs, as if giving an earnest example of what he meant to do when the strange enemy dropped to the ground.

There was nothing to hinder Dick from completing his loading, and, as he shook the priming powder into the pan and prepared to fire, he felt sorry only for one thing. This was the fact that Roger could not be the one to bring about the death of the kingly moose, since his heart seemed to have been so set on accomplishing such a valorous deed.

It was more because he must save the life of

his chum than through a desire for the death of the monster moose that caused Dick finally to pull trigger, after he had found a chance to aim back of the animal's foreleg.

The shot was instantly fatal, for those long-barreled rifles of pioneer days were capable of sending a bullet with tremendous force. The big beast fell with a crash, and immediately afterwards a loud hurrah from Roger announced that he gloried in the successful outcome of their adventure.

It was easy enough for the nimble boy to drop from his perch. He limped a little, and had a few minor bruises to show for his close contact with those horns of the bull moose. On the whole, however, Roger considered that he had been very lucky. Dick told him that he felt the same, as they stood beside the fallen monarch of the forest, and noted his powerful frame and muscles.

It was impossible to think of taking those towering horns back with them, since they would have no way of carrying the trophy save on one of their horses; and that was utterly out of the question.

"I feel a little sorry we had to kill the poor beast," admitted Dick, "much as any hunter might be proud of bringing down such big game. But his flesh is far too tough for food, and we can never dream of taking those horns with us."

"Well, he looked as if he wanted to fight as soon as he saw us there," said Roger. "That was one reason I shot as quickly as I did. But, while I had most of the fun, the glory remained for you, Dick."

"If you call that sort of thing fun, Roger, I don't admire your taste, that's all I can say! When I saw him rushing at you with his head lowered I felt a cold chill run up and down my back, for I thought you were gone."

"I don't know just what made me fasten to his horns the way I did," explained Roger, with a broad grin; "but something seemed to tell me that was my only chance, and I guess it was, too."

"How did you feel when going through the air?" questioned the other, able to smile now at the odd spectacle Roger had presented, although at the time it had seemed a serious thing indeed.

"About as near like flying as I ever expect to know," admitted Roger. "And, just as soon as I found myself in the midst of the branches of that tree, why something made me take hold and stick there. I seemed to know the old fellow was waiting down below to trample me into bits if I dropped back, and I wasn't meaning to oblige him if I could help it."

"We might manage to chop off one of his hoofs with our knives to show when we get back to camp, and prove that we really killed a moose," suggested Dick.

"That is a good idea," agreed his cousin; and it did not take them long to carry the plan out. After this they left the spot, and resumed their hunt, Roger having recovered and loaded his rifle.

They were a little afraid lest the sound of the gunshots might have caused any deer happening to be in the vicinity to take the alarm and flee. This would be too bad, after setting their hearts on procuring a supply of fresh meat.

It turned out, however, that the deer did not know the deadly significance of the firing of a gun, for within twenty minutes after leaving the dead bull moose, the boys started a deer, and Roger this time managed to do himself justice when he pulled trigger, for the young stag bounded high in the air to fall in a quivering heap.

There was ample time to cut the game up and

make their way back to camp with their prize. Nor did they have the slightest difficulty in gaining the spot where the expedition had planned to spend the coming night, thanks to Dick's way of keeping his bearings when on a hunt.

These little side excursions were always in great favor with the two boys. In carrying them out they were really killing two birds with one stone; for they not only saw considerable of the country, and met with adventures that pleased their love of action, but at the same time they were able to keep the camp well supplied with fresh meat.

When they got back on this particular afternoon they found that there was an Indian in the camp with whom Captain Lewis was making terms looking to his serving them as guide until the lofty mountain range had been crossed. It was of prime importance that they find that pass, and cross over at the lowest possible level. Once the lower ground on the other side was reached, they could congratulate themselves that the worst was over.

At the ending of the next day they found themselves at the actual foot of the mountains, of which they hoped to commence the ascent with the advent of another morning.

CHAPTER XXIII

HUNTING THE MOUNTAIN SHEEP

"How terribly big they seem, towering so high above us," Roger remarked to his cousin, as they stood just outside the camp that evening, looking upward at the lofty heights that shut out the sinking sun.

"We have never seen anything like them before," admitted Dick, "and I don't believe there are mountains back in Old Virginia, that our fathers talk about so much, that can hold a candle to these rocky heights."

"I know for one I'll be glad when we've crossed the backbone of the ridge, and can see the sun in the late afternoon again," Roger went on to say. "And after that we have the deserts to cross, if those Indian tales turn out to be true."

"I feel more anxious about that stage of our journey than I do over the dangers we may encounter in crossing the mountains," admitted Dick. "They say men and horses die of thirst

on those burning sands. I heard Captain Lewis explaining how we would make skin bags in order to carry an extra supply of water with us when we strike the sandy wastes."

So the talk, as was quite natural, was mostly of the possible terrors of the journey ahead of them. Their imagination was given full swing to picture many of the strange things mentioned by the roving Indians, though in some cases these stories turned out to be untrue.

When men had gazed upon such remarkable wonders as the spouting hot water geysers of the Yellowstone, they could be easily pardoned for believing almost anything they heard. This vast country had never been explored, and it seemed to be a veritable storehouse of strange things. (Note 7.)

The eventful morning came, and seemed to be favorable for beginning the ascent of the trail leading over the mountains by way of the pass. Indian tribes had doubtless made it in crossing from one part of the country to another. Wild animals, such as the vast herds of buffaloes, also had occasion to cross the divide according to the stages of the weather, and their hoofs had helped to make the overland trail.

It was a crisp morning in early September.

In that high altitude the air seemed wonderfully refreshing, and every one felt capable of the task that now engaged their attention.

The Indian guide assured them that they need have no apprehensions regarding the passage of the mountains, for he would lead them across as his people had come on many an occasion.

By the time noon came they had mounted far enough to have a splendid view of the plateau over which their journey for the last few days had been made. It was well worth seeing, and many times did the travelers glance backward over that extended vista, with longing thoughts concerning the loved ones who, far away toward the east, awaited word of their homecoming.

Roger had not forgotten what he had heard about those strange sheep of the mountains, with their great curved horns. He was very eager to discover whether the tales the Indians told could be true or not, and many a look did he bend on the crags above them in hope of discovering a herd of the bighorns.

It was about the middle of the afternoon, and in company with Dick he was riding at some little distance ahead of the main company, when Roger actually discovered the object he sought.



" THERE! YOU CAN SEE HIM MOVE","



"Oh, look, Dick! Tell me! is that one of those sheep of the mountains up there on that little patch of grass? There! you can see him move. He sees us, but believes himself so secure that he doesn't bother to run away."

"It must be what you say, Roger, for I can see the horns they told us about, which curve backward from his head. There, another has come around that spur of rock. I think there must be a small flock of them up there."

"But just look at the horns on that buck, Dick; how I would like to be able to get that pair to carry back with me."

"I'm afraid you'd find it a hard job to get within shooting distance of them," Dick observed, "for you can see that they seem to be on a little shelf where that grass grows, and from here I can discover no way of reaching it, except to jump a chasm."

"Still, there must be some connection above us, Dick, and I've got a good notion to try it, if only you'll take charge of my horse."

"Well, I can plainly see you will never be happy until you have made your attempt," Dick told him, "and so I suppose I'll have to do as you ask. But promise me to be careful where you trust yourself, Roger. Remember, that

you are no mountain goat, and that a fall from such a height would mean your finish."

"Oh! I promise you to be as cautious as though my name were Dick instead of Roger. All I want to find out is whether I can get to a place where my gun will send a bullet fair and square. The moose fell to you, Dick, and I think I ought to have my chance at these wonderful jumpers of the mountains."

"While you're gone, Roger, I can stop here and watch what happens. If you do shoot, and frighten the herd, it may be I can see them do some of those wonderful things we've heard about, and not half believed. But watch your steps, Roger."

Eager to discover if there was any way for him to get a shot at the feeding sheep, Roger hastened away. The last Dick saw of him, he was climbing the side of the mountain, stooping over as he went so that he might not be seen by the game he intended to stalk.

For some reason the party had halted below, and did not come along when Dick expected them. This might be fortunate for Roger, since it would keep the sheep from being startled by the appearance of numerous mounted men.

Watching the feeding animals, Dick could now

count five in all. The one with the largest horns he imagined to be the patriarch of the flock; and he could easily guess that, if Roger found a chance to shoot, his eyes would fasten upon this prize beast, for the amazing curved horns had evidently fascinated the young hunter.

As time crept past Dick wondered how his cousin was progressing. Surely, by now, he must have been able to get within easy range of the unsuspicious sheep, and could pick out his quarry, if he really meant to shoot. A good deal would depend on whether Roger believed he could retrieve his game in case he shot it. If the poor beast had to lie on the little, grass-covered, slanting plateau Dick did not believe his chum would waste a load, merely for the sake of killing.

Once or twice he could see the owner of those massive horns raise his head and sniff the air suspiciously. He even ran a few steps, as though tempted to give the note of alarm that would send them all plunging downward from the exposed point of pasturage; but, on second thought, resisted the temptation.

It may have been sheer pride in his ability to shield his flock from all harm that caused the buck to refrain from flight. Undoubtedly he felt secure upon that plateau, and, even should any peril suddenly threaten, no animal dared follow where he and his family could plunge headlong.

It cost him dearly to indulge in any such proud boast. The two-legged creature that was crawling up the face of the rocks possessed a reach far in excess of any mountain lion or panther that ever tried to make a meal of a tender ewe—that stick he carried could bridge a chasm when it spat out flame and smoke, and carry death in its wake.

Dick was getting impatient for something to happen. If Roger had learned that it was useless for him to try to get a shot, he should be coming back by now, and not taking any chances.

Just then there came the report of a rifle. The echoes were flung back and forth among the spurs of the mountains in a weird manner, but Dick paid no attention to this fact, being too busy watching what took place up on that elevated plateau.

He saw the patriarch of the flock give a leap into the air, and then fall over, roll several times, and finally vanish from sight, possibly falling into some crevice that was not visible to Dick's eyes. But an even more remarkable thing was happening than the death of the guardian of the flock. The remainder of the sheep showed symptoms of alarm. A veritable panic seemed to have struck them, as, rushing pell mell down the slope, they, one after another, sprang boldly out into space.

Holding his very breath with awe, Dick saw them strike upon their horns on the rocks below, and, apparently uninjured, continue their headlong flight. Then, after all, the amazing stories they had heard from the Indians were true. Dick felt well repaid for having stood so long, holding the horses and watching.

He believed he had heard Roger's shrill cry of triumph, though he saw nothing of his chum, look as he might.

When a little time had passed Dick began to grow somewhat anxious. He wondered if any harm could have come to Roger, or was the other trying to get to the fallen sheep that had slipped into a crevice among the rocks?

Finally Dick could stand it no longer. He decided to secure the two horses somewhere and follow the route Roger had taken. Once up above, he ought to be able to get some news of the missing one.

He was soon climbing up the face of the rocky mountain. It was no easy task, and that Roger had accomplished it without alarming the quarry was greatly to his credit. Still, there was no sign of him whom Dick wanted to see.

Dick, with the eye of a born hunter, found it easy to figure out just how Roger had proceeded. He did this by putting himself in the place of the other, and arranging his own plan of campaign.

Now and then he came across signs that told him he was on the right track. Once it was a bruised weed, which Roger must have crushed under his foot; then again it would turn out to be a piece of loose stone that he could see had only recently been cast adrift from its former anchorage.

Little things like this, that might pass unnoticed by any one not a woodsman, were to this pioneer boy as the printed words on a page to one who attends school. They told him the story just as positively as though with his own eyes he saw Roger creeping along over that very spot, taking advantage of this protruding knob to place his foot upon it, and using that stubby bush to draw himself up to some new hold above.

By degrees Dick pushed on. He knew he must be getting very close to where the other

had been when he fired the fatal shot, and still he saw no signs of Roger.

When he finally arrived at a place where further progress was impossible, without disclosing himself to the eyes of the sheep, provided they still grazed there on the grassy slope beyond, Dick knew he had reached the spot where his chum must have lain as he took careful aim and pressed the trigger.

Then afterwards he must have pressed on, seeking to reach the bighorn, fallen into the crevice.

Dick crept on.

He was beginning to feel a strange sense of impending evil. He feared that something terrible had happened to Roger, and the possibility of losing the chum whom he loved so well was enough to frighten him.

A minute later he came upon the gun. It had been carefully laid aside, he could see, which, at least, was evidence that up to then Roger had not found himself in any difficulty.

Looking beyond, Dick shuddered, for he had glimpsed what appeared to be a terrible gulf, at the end of the slope down which Roger must have made his way. If he had in some manner lost his footing, and taken that plunge, there was almost a certainty that it was all over with him.

When Dick discovered from the signs that some one had been scrambling wildly over that smooth rock his heart misgave him; and it was with a great fear that he carefully pressed on until he reached the brink of the chasm.

CHAPTER XXIV

ON THE BURNING DESERT

No sooner had Dick gained this point than he gave a whoop. It was a sound that Roger would recognize if he were living, and capable of giving back any sort of reply.

Dick's heart seemed to cease beating for the moment, such was the agony of suspense that gripped his whole being. Then, when he caught a return whoop, he knew his chum was at least alive.

- "Where are you, Roger?" he called, unable to see anything of the boy, although a little way down the sheer slope he caught sight of the dead sheep, just where it had fallen, after slipping over the edge of the opposite grassy plateau.
- "Down below here, making my way to the game," came the reassuring answer.
 - "Are you badly hurt?" demanded Dick.
- "Nothing that counts for much; and I'm bound to get my sheep, now I'm in the hole. You can't really blame me, Dick."
 - "Never mind about that now," the one above

told him; "but do you know how you are ever going to get up out of that place again?"

"There's only one way that I can see, Dick—you must go back, and, when the men come along, borrow that rope Jasper Williams always carries with him. Perhaps he will come back with you, and help drag me up—after I've saved the horns."

Knowing how determined Roger could be, once he had set his mind on a thing, Dick did not attempt to argue with him, though he believed the other was taking advantage of his position.

"Now I can see you, Roger, and, by the way you are advancing along the bottom of the crevice, I reckon you must be all right. Yes, I will go back and get the rope. Perhaps some of the men may want to try mutton for their supper to-night, and, if so, they can haul the carcass of your sheep up out of the hole."

"I'll try to be ready for you when you come back," called Roger, waving his hunting-knife toward his chum; for by that time he had reached the spot where his quarry lay, and was evidently in a big hurry to set to work upon the pair of wonderful, massive horns.

Dick went back over the rocky trail until he reached the pass, where he found the two horses

just as he had left them. Voices close at hand gave the welcome news that the other members of the exploring party were approaching; and, even as he looked, the foremost came in sight around a bend in the pass.

The men were greatly interested when they learned that Roger had actually shot a specimen of the mountain sheep of which they had heard the Indians talk. There was no lack of willing recruits when Dick once more climbed the bank, and started toward the place where he had left his chum.

Jasper Williams was one of the three men who insisted on accompanying Dick, and of course he carried with him the long, tough rope which had more than once on the journey proved to be worth its weight in silver, as for instance, when it came to hauling the batteaux up some rapids in the river.

When they reached the abrupt slope, down which Roger had managed to slip, one of the men came very near doing the same thing. Only for the timely assistance given by Jasper Williams, they might have had two comrades to haul up from the depths; and the man, being heavier, might not have escaped so luckily as the boy.

Roger had worked fast, and succeeded in cutting loose the curving horns that had given the old ram such a majestic appearance. He insisted on sending these up the first time the rope came down. Then, at the suggestion of Williams, he next attached the carcass of the sheep, which was also safely hauled up.

Last of all Roger himself came up. He had some minor bruises as the result of his fall, but he bravely stood the pain, and was proud of his recent feat.

Great was the wonder and admiration of Captain Lewis and Captain Clark when they set eyes on their first Rocky Mountain sheep. It was extremely doubtful if any white man had, up to that time, ever beheld a specimen of the *genus*. They could hardly blame Roger for wanting to carry the weighty horns along with him, though doubting the wisdom of such a course.

Dick, after considerable argument, finally convinced his cousin that it would be very foolish to burden his horse after that fashion, when, in crossing those desert lands, they had heard so much about, he would be compelled to carry a supply of water.

"The captain assures me the chances are three to one we will come back by this same pass over the mountains, and why not cache the horns somewhere? Nothing is apt to hurt them, and, once on the way toward the river, it will be easy to carry them with you. Then, when we again get aboard the boats, your troubles will be over."

Roger was not altogether unreasonable. This sort of logic convinced him that most of the others in the party would consider him foolish if he persisted.

In the end the horns were placed securely in a niche in the rocks where they were not likely to be disturbed by any prowling wild beast. The spot was marked so it could be easily found again; and after this had been done Roger felt relieved.

When they came to cook some of the sheep and test its worth as food no one was wildly enthusiastic over it. In fact they pronounced it tough; though admitting that a young specimen might prove altogether different.

Roger was even instructed to remember this in case he ever had another opportunity to procure fresh mutton; and, having already secured the desired horns, he readily promised to keep the advice in mind.

It happened, however, that another chance at

the mountain sheep never came his way. In two more days the expedition had crossed the great divide, and found that, when the sun went down, they could see far away toward a level horizon.

Remembering all the dismal tales related by the superstitious Indians of sandy wastes where only a sparse vegetation grew, the men began to feel a new anxiety. Just how far away the goal they were seeking still lay not even the astute leader, Captain Lewis, could more than guess. It might be a hundred miles, and perhaps many times that; for they had by this time reached a point where they had nothing to depend on, save the vague stories told by wandering Indians whom they happened to meet.

Some of these, however, mentioned a great body of salty water, the end of which no human eye could reach, as lying far beyond the hot deserts. There were also rivers spoken of, where the great fish swarmed in countless millions, like the stars in the Milky Way overhead, or the sands on the shore of the "Big Water."

Roger hugged these stories to his heart. He fancied that, once they struck that river of the mighty game fish, he would be in his glory; for, if there was one thing above all others Roger loved to do, it was to fish.

The time finally came when they found themselves on the verge of the desert of which they had heard so much. There could be no such thing done as pass around the sandy waste, and their only course was to head straight into the setting sun.

At the time they had with them an Indian whom Captain Lewis had succored on the way. The fellow had fallen and injured his leg so that he walked with the greatest difficulty, limping badly. He had lost his bow, and being unable to provide himself with food, and far from his home, he stood a good chance of starving to death.

They had fed him and looked after his injuries. The Indian professed to be very grateful for such help, and for several days had clung to the expedition, though able by then to walk fairly well.

He had assured them, through signs mostly, that he could serve them as guide across the hot waste of sand, as he had himself crossed it on many occasions. Captain Lewis considered this a fair return for what he had done. Dick, however, did not altogether like the Indian's looks. He thought he had a crafty way of watching everything, and that his admiration for some of

the horses might lead him to attempting a theft, unless he were diligently watched.

Still, since the captain seemed to trust him, Dick did not think it was his duty to say anything. It might look as though he were inclined to be bold. At the same time, he made up his mind that, whenever it was possible, he would keep an eye on the red man.

That night they filled with water the skin bags they had by degrees provided for the purpose. A spring that gurgled close by the camp gave them an unlimited supply of the necessary fluid; and they were warned by the guide that it would be the last waterhole they would expect to come across for many days.

In the morning the start was made, not without misgivings. No one could say what terrible things lay before them, and the men cast wistful glances back toward that cooling spring, as though they disliked to say good-by to it.

That day was one which served to give them a new experience, for, up to then, few of the explorers had ever known what it was to travel over a sandy waste where the sun beat down with blistering effect, and the air seemed fairly to quiver with the heat. No living thing had they seen all day long, save perhaps a skulking small animal, which the men at first thought to be a dog, though it must have been a coyote; a few sage hens; and some gophers, that burrowed in holes in the ground, from the entrances of which they timidly watched the horses file slowly past.

In every direction lay cacti of various species and heights, while thorny plants belonging to the same family, and bearing a small pearlike fruit which the Indian told them was edible, lay upon the ground.

They were glad when night came with its refreshing air. The camp was made in the open desert, for there was not a tree of any size in sight. And it seemed to the boys that, when the sun went down that evening, it was several times as large as usual, as well as fiery red. It beckoned them on just as before, since they knew well that *somewhere*, beyond the desert, the sun must be setting behind the vast ocean which they all aspired to see.

Another like day followed, and all of them began to suffer more or less on account of the heat, and the sand glare, which affected their eyes. On account of this, it was suggested that hereafter they rest during the hottest part of each

day, and continue their journey as far into the night as the horses could stand it.

They seemed to be thirsty most of the time, and the horses, too, needed many a refreshing drink in order to continue their labors. More than one uneasy glance was cast toward the supply of the precious fluid. If the skin sacks should spring a leak the wanderers must face a desperate condition, indeed.

So they settled down for the second night upon the open desert. Each day would be very much like another, unless they were unfortunate enough to experience one of those dreaded sand storms they had heard about, the terrors of which they could now easily imagine.

The guide, however, had spoken cheering words in his own tongue, and, by holding up two fingers of his hand, gave them to understand they were by this time half-way across the desert. If they could stand this for two more days there was hope that the worst would be over.

All of them were very tired after that long day's traveling, and, since no danger could come upon them out on the arid waste, sentries were dispensed with. Dick sat up longer than the rest, thinking he ought to keep an eye on the dusky guide; but the Indian appeared to be soundly sleeping, and weariness finally compelled the boy to succumb.

The morning came and brought with it a very disagreeable surprise. At some time during the night the sorely tempted Indian guide, forgetting his obligations to Captain Lewis, had taken an extra horse they had along and started on the back trail; not only that, but he had also carried off considerable of their supply of water, leaving the adventurers face to face with a terrible calamity.

CHAPTER XXV

THE OASIS

"I'm sorry now I allowed myself to go to sleep at all," said Dick, as he heard what had happened.

This was the first Roger knew of his suspicions, for Dick had felt that it was hardly worth while taking his chum into his confidence.

"Do you mean you didn't like the way that Indian acted, and that you meant to stay awake to keep an eye on him?" demanded Roger.

"I did at first, but I was very tired, and he seemed to be sound asleep; so I gave it up. Perhaps, if I had kept awake for just another half hour, I might have caught him in the act."

All of them were feeling depressed over the incident. It was not so much the horse they regretted, though the animal might prove valuable to them later on; but having their supply of drinking water cut short told heavily.

They started on with heavy hearts, and the future looked dismal, indeed. Still, it was not

the nature of such a man as Captain Lewis to despair when, after all, there might be no occasion for trouble. His good nature presently infected the remainder of the party, and hope again found lodgment in their hearts.

By being careful, the water could easily be made to cover two days, and by that time it was believed they would have found a fresh supply.

It had been only recently that the two boys had learned certain facts that gave them considerable cause for worry. One of the trappers, who had been out hunting just before the caravan reached the foot of the mountains, had discovered two men who wore the garb of whites.

They were armed with guns and had horses in the bargain. He had not been able to creep close enough to hear anything they said, but, from the description which he gave of the strangers, both Dick and Roger felt sure they knew who they must be.

The one with the black hair and beard was the vindictive French trader, François Lascelles; while his companion could be no other than the treacherous Andrew Waller, who had been kicked out of the camp when his duplicity became known.

The two rascals had evidently joined forces,

and continued to follow after the explorers, bent on having a sweet revenge for the indignities that had been visited upon their heads, though rightly, by Captain Lewis.

Alexis, the grown son of Lascelles, must have returned to civilization, since he had not been seen with his father. The knowledge that these evil men were bent on following them across mountain and plain, and determined on punishing the boys because their plans had been ruined, was something calculated to take away much of the pleasure Dick and Roger would otherwise have enjoyed.

From time to time their thoughts naturally went out toward Lascelles and his unscrupulous ally. They often wondered whether the two men had actually crossed the mountain range, and if they would even attempt the passage of this burning desert.

Roger in particular was indignant over the prospect of such a thing.

"It would serve them right," he declared, as he talked matters over with Dick, "if they lost their way out here on the desert, and paid the penalty with their miserable lives. I wish that would happen to them, even if it does sound wicked; but of what use are they in the world, except to bring trouble to others who never tried to harm them in the beginning?"

"And the chances are," pursued Dick, frowning, "that, after we do get across this sandy stretch, if they follow us, it will be to spread some of the same lies about our being the sons of the Great White Father at Washington. They plan to have the Indians seize us, and hold us for the ransom that would never come. It might mean we would be kept all our lives among the Indians, and never see our families any more."

"All I can say, Dick, is that I'll be a happy boy when we get across this terrible desert. When we happen on the white bones of animals that have perished here, sticking out of the sand, they make me think of finger posts pointing to our finish. To tell you the honest truth, I don't think I have ever shivered before when burning up with fever; but it's the prospect that does it."

"Oh! there's no use feeling that way," Dick assured him, seeing that really the other was very much depressed in his spirits; "we are going to pull out of this scrape, just as we always do. Before a great while things will look cheery again, take my word for it."

"If only there was any chance to find game I wouldn't feel so bad," complained Roger, touching his gun, which was fastened behind his saddle.

"Well, there is a little patch of scrub trees beyond us right now," his comrade told him. "Suppose we ride ahead and see if we are lucky enough to find a stray antelope there. Sometimes there is moisture in one of those oasis, and some grass manages to grow. It can do no harm, and will serve to take our minds off a disagreeable subject."

Roger began to show a little animation at that. Anything touching on hunting was apt to engage his attention, and raise his spirits.

"I'm with you, Dick, every time!" he hastened to exclaim; "and, if we could only strike a deer, even one of those little antelopes you spoke of, it would be worth while. Our fresh meat has given out, but we could find plenty of wood to make a fire if we needed it. That sun, though, is hot enough to cook meat by itself, I think."

After mentioning their plan to Captain Clark, who was nearby, the two lads urged their horses to increase their slow pace. This the jaded animals were not much inclined to do, but the will

of their masters prevailed, and they left the plodding caravan behind.

Dick suggested that they divide their forces, in order to approach the patch of scrubby-looking dwarf trees from two sides. This was the policy of an experienced hunter. In case there happened to be anything worth shooting among the trees, the hunters stood a double chance of getting a shot, no matter which way the deer ran.

Dick did not entertain much hope of meeting with success. From the look of the miserable timber he felt it was hardly probable that grass was growing in its midst, or that a deer should have been attracted by the promise of food. Still, it would not do to neglect any precaution; and, as he rode forward, he held his gun ready in his hand, meaning to jump to the ground before firing, so as to be more certain in his aim.

When he had reason to believe that Roger must have come up on the opposite side of the patch of trees, Dick felt that it was time to turn his horse's head, and ride directly toward his goal.

Just then he caught some sort of movement amidst the trees, though he could not tell the nature of it. Some living creature must have sought refuge there, though it might after all prove to be only a lone buzzard, pecking at a bone, or perhaps one of those larger birds which Captain Lewis had told them were vultures.

He kept watching the spot as his horse advanced. The animal snorted once or twice, which Dick considered a sign worth noticing, for it might mean that some ferocious beast lay concealed on the border of the oasis.

A moment afterwards Dick gave vent to a grunt of disgust. After all, it turned out to be a sneaking wolf of that small species which they had found to be as cowardly as it was ugly. Yes, now he had a good glimpse of the animal, running along the edge of the timber, and evidently expecting to make off in the other direction.

Dick hoped Roger would not be tempted to waste a shot on the cowardly beast, for its death could not be of the least advantage to them. It's presence there settled the last lingering hope he had felt concerning the finding of game. No antelope was apt to stay long when one of those hungry coyotes came around, Dick imagined.

He rode slowly on. The patch of trees was really larger than he had imagined, and, while about it, Dick felt he should make doubly sure. Perhaps they might run on a small spring there in the oasis, though the appearance of things did not inspire him with much confidence.

"It would be even better than finding game, if we did come across a water hole," he was telling himself as he pushed on.

He heard Roger give a loud yell on the other side of the oasis. Evidently he had just discovered the skulking animal and was shouting to start him in full flight across the sandy waste. But he did not shoot, for which Dick was glad.

Now, having arrived at the border of the scrubby trees, Dick jumped down and fastened his horse to a convenient branch. It was his intention to enter the patch of timber on foot, as Roger was doubtless doing from the other side. They could scour the whole of it in a brief time, and find out whether so much as a cup of water was to be obtained.

He could hear Roger advancing opposite to him, and knew they would soon meet. Even then he caught sight of the other moving along, though evidently hopeless of finding anything in the shape of game.

Dick had just opened his mouth to say something when he was thrilled to hear a dreadful,

rattling sound that he knew only too well. At the same time Roger sprang hastily back, and uttered a loud cry of alarm.

CHAPTER XXVI

AMONG THE NEZ PERCES

"Look out, Dick, there are rattlesnakes all around here. I can see three of them right in front of you! Get back, Dick, get back, I tell you!"

Dick hastened to comply, for by that time he also had detected the presence of the venomous reptiles. They seemed to be of a small species, such as can be found on the plains of the entire West, but their stroke carries just as sure death as though the snakes were twice the size.

The boys had often come across them of late, mostly near the colonies of gophers, for the two seemed to be able to dwell together in harmony, though possibly the snakes made an occasional meal from some of the puppies.

Roger had already laid aside his gun, and picking up a long stick, he commenced to belabor some of the coiled snakes.

"Think you own the earth do you?" Roger was saying, as he plied his stick with vigor, and

knocked first one snake and then another into a wriggling mass. "Well, I want to show you that others besides you have a right to breathe, and walk where they please. That makes the fifth one I've smashed, Dick. Did you ever see such a nest of the 'varmints,' as Jasper Williams would call them?"

Roger evidently meant to keep on just as long as there was a single one of the ugly, scaly creatures in sight. He certainly had more than his share of antipathy toward all reptiles, for he never let an opportunity to kill one escape him.

When he could no longer find anything to hit, Roger consented to drop the stick, secure his rifle, and prepare to leave the scrubby timber. They could find nothing in the way of water, though there must have been something of the sort underground to have allowed those ugly dwarf trees to grow in the first place.

"There goes the silly, little wolf scurrying off," said Roger as they mounted once more, Dick having brought his horse through the patch of woods. "He must think we set great store by his dingy hide, and would take after him. But I'm disappointed because we failed to get an antelope."

"Better luck next time, Roger," his comrade

told him; for nothing seemed to crush the spirits of this sanguine lad.

The third day passed, and, as the blazing sun sank again beyond the glittering horizon, none of them, even by shading his eyes with his hands, could see any sign to proclaim that they were drawing near the end of the desert.

It was not a very cheerful party that sat around on blankets that night and exchanged ideas concerning their prospects of pulling through these difficulties. The horses were showing signs of the hard usage to which they had been put. Lack of forage made them hungry all the time, since the small amount of hay that could be carried was almost gone.

With the morning they were again on the way, the sun at their backs. Noon found them resting, though the journey was resumed later on. When once more the sun went down its glow showed them trees in the near distance, the presence of which they had not been able to detect before, on account of the shimmer of the sun's torrid rays on the shining sand.

It was the consensus of opinion among the men that they were now close to the western extremity of the desert, and they decided to keep on moving far into that night if necessary, in order to reach the timber that promised them water, and shelter from the terrible sun.

Before midnight they arrived at the trees and had hardly made their way among them when some of the weary men sank to the ground, unable to continue further. Camp was made on the spot, and the remainder of the night was spent in refreshing slumber.

While the desert had been left behind, they now had a new source of trouble. Water they could obtain as often as they needed it, but their food supplies had fallen very low, nor were the hunters able to find game, though they searched early and late for signs of deer or bear; anything, in fact, that could be eaten.

"If this sort of thing keeps on," Roger grumbled, when he and Dick were returning from an unsuccessful search for game, "there's only one resort left to us, and that is to feed on horse flesh. I'd hate to come to it; but, rather than starve to death, I believe I'd try it."

Dick laughed at hearing this confession.

"And yet, when we were among the Sioux," he remarked merrily, "you threw up your hands in horror at the thought of eating baked dog, which the Indians esteem a great delicacy, so that they seldom have it except when they want

to make a great feast. How do you feel about that now, Roger?"

"To be honest with you, Dick, I've changed my mind somehow. Those were days when we always had plenty to eat; but now the rations have become so scanty that we feel half starved most of the time. Yes, I believe that if I was asked to sit down to a feast of baked dog, I'd accept, and with thanks."

"Well, there's nothing like hunger to serve as sauce at a meal," laughed Dick. "And, when I tell them at home how you were cured of some of your nice notions about the kind of food you long for, they will think it quite a joke."

"We're in a bad fix as it goes," resumed Roger; "with some of the men half sick from their sufferings on this long trip, little to eat in camp, and a slim prospect of getting anything from now on. Perhaps, after coming so far, none of us will live to see that wonderful ocean."

"Oh! yes we shall, never fear," Dick assured him. "But stop and look ahead. What have we run up against now, I wonder. It looks like an Indian family on the move."

"You are right, Dick," cried Roger. "They have a horse, and two poles fastened so that the

other ends drag on the ground. On that they have hides, and I can see a squaw and a papoose. Suppose we try and see if we can make ourselves understood?"

"I mean to," replied the other, quickly.
"The warrior may be able to direct us to the river we are seeking, down which we hope to float until we come to the sea itself."

They walked nearer the Indians, who by this time had discovered their presence, and were undoubtedly amazed to see people with white skins in that part of the country.

"We have never, up to now, come in contact with any Indians dressed as that fellow is," remarked Dick, as he held up his hand with the palm toward the woman, to indicate that their intentions were friendly; for that seems to be a sign universally understood among all the savage peoples of the world.

"It may be they belong to the Nez Perces tribe, and the man is a brave, because he wears the bear claws about his neck," (Note 8) suggested Roger; "I heard Captain Clark speaking about them only yesterday, and saying we must soon strike their hunting grounds, for he had learned about them from other tribes."

As the two boys joined the Indians they saw

that the fat squaw had a small papoose in her arms. Dick instantly discovered that the child was suffering in some way, possibly from cramps in its little stomach. According to the native custom nothing would be done to relieve the pain, that is in the way of medicine. When they reached their village the old medicine man would doubtless be called in to conduct his eccentric dances around the writhing child, to rattle his hollow gourds that contained small stones, and to do everything in his power to frighten off the evil spirit that was believed to be tormenting the papoose.

Dick tried to begin a conversation with the brave. As he could depend only on gestures it was rather difficult; but, by this time, both boys were becoming more or less expert in this sort of thing. Presently he managed to convince the brave that he was a medicine man after a fashion, and would be glad to try to relieve the sufferings of the papoose.

When the squaw understood this from what her man told her, she looked dubious. Evidently her faith had made her believe that the more fantastic the costume of the healer, the better chance there would be of success; and how then could this boy with the white skin frighten away the evil spirit when he made no attempt to disguise himself?

Both brave and squaw looked anxiously on as Dick took out a little case from his pocket and extracted a tiny bottle. It was only camphor that the phial contained, but Dick felt positive it would work wonders, if only he could get the child to swallow a dose.

This was finally managed with the help of the squaw. Since they had consented to allow the "paleface wizard" to try to charm the evil spirit out of the papoose, she meant that the experiment should be carried out regardless of the child's whims; and so with her finger she thrust the medicine down the little one's throat.

Dick then went on to talk with his fingers. He was trying to find out whether the village of the brave was nearby, and finally succeeded in learning they would come upon it in one day's walk, or the sweep of the sun from the east to the west.

From what the other said in his native fashion Dick was not quite sure about its position. He cut a piece of bark from a tree and held it out to the Nez Perces brave, together with a nail, showing him how to mark upon the smooth surface.

Apparently the Indian was shrewd enough to grasp his meaning, for he immediately commenced to make crude figures. Roger watched his efforts with growing eagerness.

"I do believe he's caught what you've been trying to say to him, Dick!" he exclaimed in glee. "See there now! he's gone and made a lot of cone-shaped things that I'm sure must stand for wigwams. That's meant for his village; and now he's making a wriggly line past it. Do you think that can stand for a river?"

"No question but that it does, Roger. There, now he makes a broader line of the same kind, which must mean a big river that the first one flows into."

"Watch him now, Dick; what does he mean by all that curly stuff? To me it looks like waves rolling up onto the beach, just as we've seen them at that lake near which we passed the winter on the Yellowstone."

"I really believe he means that the broad river empties into the sea!" announced Dick, at which Roger could hardly repress his feelings of exultation.

"Hurrah!" he cried, "we have struck something worth while at last, if only we can coax this brave to go to camp with us. And Dick,

your medicine has worked wonders already, for the papoose seems to be kicking no longer. I guess the cramps have been settled."

The squaw beamed on them now. She was evidently awed by the wonderful success of the "paleface medicine man," who found no necessity for indulging in fantastic dances and such things, but chased the evil spirit out by simply sending a message down the child's throat that he must vacate!

Again Dick endeavored to tell the brave that, if they would accompany the boys to where they had companions, all of them on the following day would go to the Nez Perces village with the Indians, and enjoy the hospitality of the red men.

It ended in the others accepting, so that, half an hour later, they reached the camp, where their coming created no end of excitement; for every one expected it would soon lead to great things.

If the boys had failed to secure any game in this, their last hunt, at least they had accomplished what was better; for, with the new prospects ahead of them, it began to look as though their troubles might all be in the past.

Captain Lewis spent almost two hours in sign

talk with the Indian that evening, after they had smoked the peace pipe between them. Together with what he was able to pick up, and the crude map fashioned by the brave on the smooth bark, he felt convinced that they would soon arrive at a river that eventually emptied into the great ocean which they had traveled thousands of miles to gaze upon.

No longer were the weary explorers given over to hopelessness, as had begun to be the case of late. The future began to assume a rosy hue, and both boys felt certain the success that had been dangling before them as a tempting bait all these long months was about to become a certainty.

When morning came they once more set forth, but now laughter was the rule instead of silence and long faces. The brave and his squaw had by degrees overcome their feeling of awe, and were quite friendly with the men.

"I think," said Dick to Roger, as they rode slowly on, "I heard him trying to explain to the captain that his chief and most of the men in the village would be away at this time, for they expected to start on a big hunt, to lay in a store of jerked meat for the winter season. But that will not make any difference. He says his peo-

ple will welcome us, especially after they know what a great medicine man is coming."

At that both boys laughed aloud.

"If you are wise," said Roger, "you will get ready to do a big business, because every old squaw that has an aching tooth will call upon you to chase the demon of pain away."

"Oh! very well," replied Dick, carrying his honors easily, "I'll draw out the aching molars, and in that way bring freedom from pain. But all of us will be glad to rest for a while in the Nez Perces village."

"Yes," added Roger. "And, moreover, we hope they will be free with their food, because our stock has by this time got down to nearly nothing. For once I think I could enjoy some Indian cooking."

"Even if it has to be a feast of baked dog!" added Dick, at which the other made a grimace, though he immediately replied:

"Yes, even that, if the rest of you try it. I don't hold myself to be any better than my comrades, and what they can stand I ought to. Perhaps, who knows, all of us may yet take a great liking for the dish. The first man who ever swallowed a raw oyster must have had a strong stomach, I should say."

Late that afternoon they came upon the Nez Perces village, which they found located upon quite a noble river. This stream the explorers immediately called the Lewis River in honor of their intrepid leader. Sad to say in later years this well-earned name was changed to that of Snake River, showing what short memories those who came after must have had, in forgetting how much they were indebted to Captain Meriwether Lewis.

CHAPTER XXVII

FROM SADDLE TO CANOE AGAIN

It was soon planned that a short stop should be made here, in order to recuperate to some extent after their recent strenuous experiences. A number of the men had become ill through long exposure to the burning sun, and the lack of proper food. Captain Lewis hoped to have them in good shape presently, so that they could start forth upon the last dash for the Pacific Coast.

Besides, the chief being absent, there was really no one of authority in the Nez Perces village with whom to deal; and just then the explorers wished to make a covenant, or bargain.

From now on they could make much better use of boats than of horses, and it was hoped to effect an arrangement with the Nez Perces chieftain to care for the animals they owned through the coming winter. Then, the adventurers hoped to borrow canoes and to finish the long journey by the water. When, in the spring, they returned that way, they could change back, and reward the friendly Indians for taking care of the horses, which would, of course, be needed again in crossing to the mountains.

Several pleasant days in September passed away, while the members of the expedition waxed hale and hearty again. They had plenty to eat, and even made out to secure an amount of food from the Indians to last them for some time ahead, in case game proved to be scarce.

No one anticipated such a thing, however, because from all reports they judged there was great hunting along the lower river that emptied into the sea. Then there was the multitude of splendid fishes, the flesh of which they were told resembled that of the mountain trout.

These the travelers had already classified as salmon, because Captain Lewis had seen that noble game fish caught in Maine and Canada, where it came in fresh from the ocean to spawn in the headwaters of the rivers.

Many were the stories the Nez Perces told, in their sign language mostly, about the Indians who frequented the lower reaches of this broad river, where the "shining fish" swarmed at times so that no man could count their number, which was like the grains of sand on the beach. As near as the boys could make out these natives, from some peculiarity connected with their person, were known far and wide as the Flat Heads. They seemed to be of an exceedingly warlike disposition, and great hunters, as well as persistent fishermen.

Their method of taking the salmon was with a spear, and in the season an adept could daily throw up on the bank a glittering pile of the big fish calculated, when dried after a manner in vogue among them, to last his lodge all winter.

Many were the interesting things the boys learned when they found a means of talking with the peaceful Nez Perces. The days passed almost too quickly for even Roger, impatient as he was to set eyes on the goal of their hopes.

And, just as had been anticipated, the fame of Dick as a "big medicine" spread through all the skin lodges of the tribe. People even came from other settlements to consult the "wonder boy," who could chase the evil spirits out of a suffering body by simply sending down a pill to wrestle with the monster.

Dick had his hands full, much to the amusement of his cousin. He did not shirk his duty, though careful not to utterly exhaust his precious store of drugs, compounded for the most part by his mother's own hands.

The head chief finally returned, and with him the band of warriors who had been on the grand hunt. They brought back with them a large store of fresh meat, which the squaws immediately set to work to dry after their crude fashion, thus converting it into "pemmican," black, tough stuff which made the boys shudder to look at, but which could sustain the human frame wonderfully.

Success having attended the annual hunt, the chief was in a particularly good humor. He felt that the coming of these "palefaces" must have had something to do with the bountiful supply of game he and his warriors had come across.

Besides, the whites intended going down into the country of the dreaded Flat Heads, and their influence might be exerted to make peace between those Indians and the Nez Perces. So a feast was spread, at which all of the whites had the pleasure of tasting baked dog, which they agreed was fair eating, though none of them came back for a second helping.

The chief readily entered into a covenant whereby, for a certain consideration, he agreed

to care for the horses of the whites until they came up the river in the spring, upon which the animals were to be returned to their owners.

Besides this, canoes were loaned to the "pale-faces," boats made of skin, and a little insecure, but nevertheless serviceable for the purposes of the explorers.

"Do you think the chief will keep his word about the horses, Dick?" asked Roger, after they had heard of the arrangement between the two captains and the head men of the tribe, after passing the pipe solemnly around the circle at the council fire.

"Yes, I feel sure he will," Dick replied. "I like his looks, and in nearly every case the word of an Indian, once given, is better than the bond of many white men."

"But you remember how that false guide deceived us in the desert, and ran away with one of our horses?" objected Roger.

"There never was a rule that did not have an exception," Roger was told. "Now and then you may find a red man who dishonors his word, but in the main they would sooner be torn to pieces than betray a trust. We shall see our horses when we come back this way, Roger, if we are so lucky as to be able to return."

"Then there was that news we had about those two white men who were seen by a Nez Perces hunter far down the river," said Roger, uneasily. "They were in a canoe, and had evidently passed the village in the nighttime, unseen. At the time the Nez Perces saw them they were dickering with some of the Flat Heads, as though meaning to make allies of those fighters."

"It sounds as if we might be in for another lot of trouble, before we reach the end of our voyage," admitted Dick.

"Then you agree with me, Dick, that those two men must be our bitter foes, François Lascelles and Andrew Waller?"

"Yes, I'm sorry to say they must be those men and no others. But, Roger, something seems to tell me that we may not be bothered much longer by their dark plotting. They are apt to overdo the matter, and perhaps be slain by the very power they set in motion to destroy us."

"You mean the fighting Flat Heads may turn on them, sooner or later; is that it, Dick?" asked Roger, eagerly.

"That is a fate which has overtaken many such schemers," came the answer. "Unscrupulous men often start fires that, in the end, consume them. My father has told me that many a time. We have been preserved through all our adventures, and for one I can face the future without flinching. I do not believe it will be our fate to die at the hands of such rascals as those men are."

It was on the following day after this talk between the two chums that, all preparations having been completed, the little party embarked for the last lap of their long trip, which in the case of Captain Lewis meant from coast to coast.

The friendly Nez Perces gave them a good send-off. There were even some whoops, and waving of hands, after the whites had pushed off from the shore.

Perhaps of all the party Dick would be most missed. His numerous patients would mourn the absence of the "big medicine," should there be a return of their maladies later on. Perhaps they feared that the Evil Spirit might venture to take double toll on account of the serious setback received during the presence in their midst of the "wonder doctor."

"And one thing sure," Roger told his cousin, as they worked their paddles industriously to

keep ahead of the other boats, "you will have to get to work and make up a new stock of medicine after the manner you've seen your mother do it; for, when we come back this way in the spring, if we ever do, there'll be a crop of ailments waiting for you to take care of."

Dick only laughed good-naturedly.

"I was thinking about that myself," he stated,
"and I believe I could do it, provided we can
find the same kind of herbs growing out here.
But it certainly feels good to me to be in a boat
again, after all that hard work riding a horse
across a hot desert."

Roger felt the same way, for the boys were much more at home with a paddle in their hands than in the saddle. Brought up on the bank of the Missouri, they had early become adepts on and in the water, and they spent much of their time fishing, in order to supply the families with the food that was needed.

That night they made camp on the bank of the Lewis. They were surrounded by the great trees that have since then made Oregon and Washington forests famous; and all this was so vastly different from their recent experiences amidst desert sands that it was no wonder every one's spirits were buoyant.

Of course the boys wanted to take a little turn around the camp before night set in, hoping to come across some game. This they could easily do because, at the time, they had nothing to do with getting supper ready, as it was not their turn to serve as cooks.

Once again success came their way, for they succeeded in starting a buck, and, although it took a double shot to bring the fleet animal down, Dick proved equal to the occasion, after Roger's bullet seemed to be wasted.

This circumstance seemed to annoy the latter very much, for he was jealous of his well-earned reputation as a marksman. It did not surprise Dick, then, when the other's first move upon reaching the fallen buck was to examine eagerly the quarry.

"I thought it was queer if I missed him entirely," declared Roger, with a ring of triumph in his voice; "you can see where my bullet passed through his body, but, as luck would have it, no vital part was touched. I'm glad you managed to finish him, Dick."

"Yes, so am I for several reasons," remarked the other; "in the first place we need the meat. Then again, it would be too bad for him to run for miles and in the end drop, and that wound you gave him would have proved fatal finally."

Of course the party rejoiced to see a supply of meat come in. They knew they could depend on the boys to procure it if there chanced to be any game in the vicinity; and when they heard the double shot more than one of the men licked his lips in full expectation of a treat.

It is a good thing to have a reputation for accomplishing things, for there are times when it spurs the possessor on, in order that he may not lose caste with his admirers.

Roger was not fully satisfied with the shooting of the buck. His fishing instinct had been aroused by the tales he had heard concerning the great finny prizes to be had in these rivers that ran down to the sea, and he longed to be able to capture his first prize in the shape of a salmon.

So, immediately after supper, he got his line in readiness, and set it in hope of a strike. Many times during the evening he left the vicinity of the campfire, where the men were sitting at their ease and exchanging stories, to make an eager investigation of his line.

Roger was, however, doomed to disappointment that night. Either the salmon did not run so far from the sea at this time of the year, or else his bait had not proven satisfactory. In time, no doubt, he would learn better; or he could possibly find a chance to make use of the spear he had secured from a Nez Perces brave, and which was used for striking the great fish as they passed through some narrow estuary of the river, running between the rocks.

CHAPTER XXVIII

AT THE FALLS OF THE COLUMBIA

"I HOPE you don't think I'm discouraged, Dick, because so far no fish has come near my hook?" remarked Roger, when the time came to wrap their blankets around them and seek rest.

"Oh! I know you too well to believe that," replied the other. "From now on I expect to see you doing your best to land a prize. Sooner or later success is bound to come, Roger."

"I know it," was the confident way the other spoke; "because I've always made it my business to stick to the old motto, 'If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.' And even if the fish refuse to look at my bait I've got that spear, you remember. One of these days I'll find a chance to launch it, and bring up a salmon worth looking at."

Dick always liked to hear Roger talk that way. It was his constancy that in the past had won him many a battle; for Roger had a stubborn streak in his nature and would come back again and again to make new attempts. As the water by everlasting dripping will wear away a stone, so this "never-say-die" spirit often won out in the end.

Nothing disturbed the slumbers of the travelers during that first night upon the bank of the Lewis River. They started again early in the morning, for, now that the end of their journey was almost in sight, a fever began to possess them to cover the ground as rapidly as possible.

New sights opened up to their gaze with every mile of progress made. The paddles dipped into the clear water, and the sunlight, falling on the drops dripping from the blades, made each one resemble a glittering diamond.

After their life spent on the muddy Missouri it was a great pleasure to Dick and Roger to find themselves upon a stream where they could in places look down for many feet, and see the stones on the bottom, so transparent was the water.

As they floated along, waiting for the others to catch up with them, the boys' favorite amusement was to lie still, and, looking over the gunnel of their hide canoe, watch the small fishes darting to and fro; or thrust a paddle at some

clumsy turtle that had come up to see what sort of object this floating log could be.

It was not always as pleasant as this, however, for one day they had a downpour of rain that caused them to make hurriedly for the shore, and get their tents up with as little delay as possible.

The storm continued all of the following day, and an unusual amount of rain for that time of year descended. After that the water was not so clear as before, the boys noticed. There were also places where they discovered landslides had occurred, sections of the bank having slipped into the rising river.

"It's a good thing we picked out a camp site where the ground was firm," Roger observed, as they passed such a slide on the next day, and saw what a terrible thing it had been.

Dick was ready to agree with what his companion said. He shrugged his broad shoulders and shook his head.

"It would have proved a bad job for us, I take it, Roger, if we had been camping on this spot. Think of having the ground slip from under you while you sleep; and of awaking to find yourself struggling in the river. Yes, we were lucky to be on firm ground while the rain lasted."

"The days keep passing along," mused Roger, "and so far I haven't been able to take a single salmon. And only this morning I'm sure I saw one jump out of the water after some sort of insect. If only I knew what kind of fly it was I might be able to coax one of the big fish to come to time."

"It is near the end of October, too," Dick remarked, "and any day now Captain Lewis says he expects that we must reach the lower river."

"And, after that, all we have to do is to let the swift current carry us along to the sea; eh, Dick?"

"Our only remaining danger will come from the Flat Head Indians who live along the banks of the broad river. Then we must remember, you know, Roger, that there is a great fall somewhere below us. The Nez Perces Indians told us they make a noise like thunder when the water is high, as it is after so much rain."

"Of course we must keep on the watch for the fall, Dick; I give you my word for it, I have no desire to be carried over the brink in one of these frail little hide canoes. It would be smashed on the rocks below, and, as for us, we might not know what had happened."

"Just watch that fish hawk hovering over that

place in the river, meaning to snatch up his dinner when he gets ready. There's the champion fisher for you, Roger. If that bird could only talk he could tell you all about the habits of these wary salmon that so far you haven't succeeded in catching."

"There he goes!" cried Roger, excitedly. "Oh! what a splash he made! And, Dick, look at him trying to get up again! It's all he can do to rise, beating his wings like a crazy thing. See the fish the fellow has fastened his claws on, Dick. There goes a salmon, I do believe, the very first we've seen!"

The big fish hawk was indeed having a hard battle trying to fly with such a large fish in its talons. It fluttered its wings, and still could not manage to get more than twenty feet above the water.

As it turned toward the bank, doubtless meaning that, if compelled to release its hold on the glittering prize, the fish should fall upon land where it could be eaten at leisure, Roger gave vent to another exclamation.

"When it gets off the river I'm going to shout, and see if I can frighten the hawk into letting that fish drop," he observed, eagerly.

"I'll join with you, then," agreed his chum.

A few seconds later, Roger made a signal with his paddle at which both of them gave forth a startling yell. Surely enough, the sudden discordant sound startled the fish hawk, and it immediately let its prize go.

"There, it landed on the bank!" cried Roger.
"Quick! let's paddle ashore before it flops back
into the river again. Oh! my first salmon seems
to be coming to me from the air after all!"

Reaching the bank, Roger sprang ashore, and presently came back, carrying his capture by inserting a finger in the gill. It was indeed a salmon, though only of a comparatively few pounds weight, and nothing compared to myriads they were fated to see later on.

"Enough to make a supper for both the captains, and ourselves in the bargain!" explained the triumphant Roger. "And I want to say that never before did I pull in a fish from the air. That's a new way of doing it, Dick. I'll never see an industrious fish hawk after this but that I'll think of what happened today."

"If you hadn't secured the fish some robber eagle might," declared Dick. "Many a time have I sat and watched one of those bald-headed pirates, perched on a dead limb of a tree, too

lazy to pounce down and get a dinner for himself, and only waiting until a hawk flew off with its prize, when, after the other bird, would start the eagle, and ten times out of eleven he was bound to play the robber game."

"Yes," added Roger, "I've seen the poor hawk mount high in the air, trying to escape; but with the eagle in hot pursuit. In the end the fish would drop, and the eagle follow after it, snatching his dinner from the air long before it could strike the earth; just as I can let a stone fall, and then overtake it with my hand before it lands."

It was on the second day after this incident that the boys, who were ahead of the others, were heard giving glad yells. The secret of all this joy was soon made manifest, for they had really arrived at the junction of the Lewis with the Columbia, as they immediately called the majestic stream that, with a swift current, ran to the west, and flowed out into the sea.

All their hopes, so long delayed, seemed now on the eve of realization; and there were no despondent hearts in the camp when night again found them.

It was with satisfaction that they looked out upon the noble stream, in the belief that the confidence which President Jefferson had felt in their ability to overcome all difficulties on the road had now been justified.

It was just a day afterward that Roger found a chance to strike his first salmon with the Indian spear. He and Dick had gone ashore at a likely-looking spot where a small tributary entered the river. The character of the ground emboldened Roger to believe he might run across some of the places such as the Indians loved to frequent when fishing after their peculiar style.

He found that he could creep along and look down upon the water five or six feet below, where the shadows were dense, and the passage of a silvery salmon would seem like a ray of sunlight.

Here the boy waited, crouching silently, just as he imagined the expert Indian fish-spearers were wont to hang. And presently Dick, who was watching close by, saw him make a furious jab with his spear. Following this, Roger struggled desperately, and then dragged up a magnificent fish, floundering at the end of the spear.

This he repeated twice more, when they had enough for the whole party. That was certainly

a red letter day in the life of Roger, and one he was not likely soon to forget.

More days passed, and they were constantly descending the majestic river, now unusually high on account of the recent heavy rains. Twice they were compelled to cut short their day's trip in order to seek shelter from a downpour; and, after such a recent experience of the dry and arid strip of country stretching out toward the foot of the Rocky Mountains, they hardly knew what to make of such weather.

There came a day when, ahead of them, they heard a dull sound that thrilled every heart. The falls of the Columbia must be at hand, where they would be compelled to make a portage with the canoes and their cargoes.

Roger would have liked to strike out and be the first to get within seeing distance of this natural wonder, but Dick curbed his impatience.

"Better hold back and keep near the rest," he advised. "We none of us know anything about the falls, and from the Indians we've heard they are very dangerous. They even claim that a bad spirit is chained under the water, and always ready to overturn the canoe of any venturesome brave who ventures too near."

The current was becoming furiously swift, and Captain Lewis, like the wise leader he was, advised that all the boats make for the shore. It required considerable sturdy work to effect this, for they had already gone further down than discretion fully warranted.

All would have gone well except for an unfortunate accident. The paddle which Roger was using had been cracked a little recently; indeed he had just that morning discovered the flaw, and declared he must lose no time in making a new one.

When Roger worked he did it with all his vim and energy; consequently there was a greater strain on his paddle than would have been the case had Dick, for instance, been handling it.

Feeling the savage pull of the fierce current the boy even put a little extra strength into his labor, which was a hazardous thing to do, considering the circumstances.

Dick, methodically handling his own blade, was suddenly thrilled to hear his comrade give vent to a cry of dismay. As he looked up he saw Roger holding the fragment of a paddle in his hands. The treacherous blade had broken just at the most critical time possible. They were held fast in the grip of a current which

Dick, with his single paddle, could never succeed in combatting; and just below them the roar of the falls sounded, while they could see the foamcapped waves, that announced the beginning of the rapids, just ahead of their drifting canoe!

CHAPTER XXIX

NEARING THE SALTY SEA

FORTUNATELY the others were close at hand when this catastrophe happened. Dick, of course, plied his paddle with the utmost vigor, but, in spite of his endeavors, their canoe was dragged perilously close to the verge of the fall, and, if left to themselves, the boys would have had a serious time of it.

The nearest boat chanced to contain Jasper Williams and another. Williams had always been known as a quick-witted man when trouble came suddenly from a clear sky.

Loud cries arose. Then this boat was seen speeding straight toward the one that had been crippled by the breaking of the paddle.

"Here, take hold of this rope!" Jasper Williams was heard calling, and Roger, who had been watching the approach of the other canoe in a sort of dumb anxiety, not knowing how their arrival would help, managed to secure the line that came flying through the air.

He saw what the trapper had in mind. Dick, too, bent all his energies to his own paddle, while the blades in the other canoe flashed fast and furiously as the two paddlers bent their broad backs to the task.

The current was loath to give up its expected prey, and it fought furiously before admitting defeat; but brain triumphed in the end. One thing that helped materially was the fact that with every yard they gained in the direction of the bank the grip of the current grew less severe.

In the end they reached land, much to the relief of both boys. Roger looked a little white under the eyes, although he stoutly protested that he had not been much alarmed.

When later on they had a chance to see from what they had escaped through the happy circumstance of Jasper Williams' possession of the rope, the boys were very grateful things had turned out as they did. Dick realized that there was not much hope for any one unfortunate enough to be swept over those falls, and carried through the rapids, where cruel rocks waited on every hand to bruise the victim.

The party went into camp on the spot, and expected to be lulled to sleep that night by the

Roger meant to busy himself below the falls as soon as he could get there, armed with his spear, of which he had by this time become very proud.

They soon learned that this spot was a favorite fishing place for the Indians. Indeed, there did not seem to be a minute of the day that one or more dusky sons of the wilderness could not be seen prowling around, armed with spears with which they would adroitly stab any fish that came within reach. (Note 9.)

The salmon on reaching a waterfall exhibits a wonderful agility in lofty leaping, in the endeavor to gain the upper reaches of the stream. This, of course, is more frequent in the spring when the fish wish to reach their spawning beds far up in the rivers. Still, the boys saw many fish make the leap while they were at the falls, some reaching projecting ledges, and resting for another frantic attempt; others falling back, doubtless to make a more successful effort later.

These Indians the boys found were of a different tribe from any they had thus far encountered, and they soon decided they must belong to the fighting tribe of whom they had heard so many contradictory accounts, the Flat Heads.

Very naturally, since they had probably never before seen a white man, the Indians displayed considerable curiosity. They were at first inclined to flee, showing all the signs of alarm and enmity; but Captain Lewis made friendly signs, and in the end succeeded in soothing their fears.

"I don't like their looks, though," Roger said to Dick, as they watched several of the Flat Head braves accepting little trinkets, such as colored beads and minute mirrors, which had been carried along for the purpose of trading with the natives.

"I agree with you there," admitted Dick.
"They have a different appearance from the friendly Nez Perces, the Mandans, or any other tribe we have met so far."

"I believe they must be more treacherous than the others," continued Roger, uneasily. "You know we have heard not a single good word about them from any source."

"Well, 'the proof of the pudding is in the eating of it,' as we've heard many the time at home, Roger; and we shouldn't judge people wholly by their looks. Captain Lewis seems to be willing to trust them. If any person can make friends with these Flat Heads, he will."

"Unless they've already determined to hate, and try to exterminate us," grumbled the other, of course referring to the underhand measures which they believed Lascelles and his companion meant to put into practice.

It was not long before Roger found a good use for his spear. He watched how the red fishermen plied their weapons and copied their method. Although he could hardly expect to be an expert in the beginning the boy soon learned to handle his new tool with considerable skill; and Dick commended his work when he saw him strike a splendid silvery fish that had shown itself near the surface.

It was not a very difficult task getting the canoes around the portage, or carry. There was a regular path which doubtless had been worn by the moccasined feet of countless red Indians for ages past, since this spot must always have been a favorite one for laying in stores of fish food.

The second night was passed some distance below the falls, though their musical roar could still be plainly heard. Always eager to learn facts in connection with what lay ahead, Captain Lewis questioned some of the Indians once more with regard to how many days journey they still had to expect before arriving at the ocean.

Thanks to his mastery of the sign language, the commander was able to discover what he sought; and it was pleasing intelligence that he communicated to the rest of the company that same night.

November was at hand, and before the month had gone far they should arrive at the termination of their great adventure, with the ocean stretching before them.

From the present time they could count on an easy voyage, unless something entirely unexpected cropped up to dismay them. The current of the Columbia was swift, and could be counted on to carry them along without a paddle being dipped, if they felt like avoiding the labor.

Already were the men beginning to count on the glorious experience they expected to have while the winter lasted, hunting and fishing as the weather permitted, and with the wonderful sea to gaze upon. It was planned to go into winter quarters as soon as they arrived at their destination. This would permit of their gathering a great store of food, after the Indian custom.

Only one fly remained in the ointment of the

boys. They could not forget that, as long as the revengeful Frenchman, François Lascelles, hovered about that part of the country, they could never feel safe. No matter if he were unseen, they knew him well enough to believe that he would be plotting in some underhand way to injure them, as he had done so many times in the past.

"We will never know a minute's peace as long as that man is alive," said Roger, when the subject came up to cast a shadow on their happiness.

The weather did not improve as they descended the Columbia. Rain fell frequently, and twice they saw where serious landslides had occurred. It made them more careful as to where they camped when night came, for, should they be so unfortunate as to be caught in one of these slips, the result was apt to be exceedingly serious.

They saw Indians daily. Sometimes these were ashore, and again they met them in canoes made of hide, or, it might be, dugouts formed from logs. In most cases the natives avoided them, for the sight of white faces and beards filled them with wonder and fear. Some of them must have believed the explorers had come from one of the stars, and were people of another world, for never had they dreamed there could be any but copper-colored inhabitants on this sphere.

Nor were the adventurers always free from peril from this source. On several occasions an arrow had been known to hurtle into camp; and one of the men even received a flesh wound.

For a short time it was feared the shaft might have had a poisoned tip, and every expedient to neutralize the venom was immediately applied. As the man did not suffer any great disability on account of his injury, they finally concluded that the Flat Heads, at least, did not dip the heads of their war arrows in the poison of the rattlesnake, as some tribes were known to do. (Note 10.)

Captain Lewis did not like the menacing manner in which some of these Indians acted when on the bank of the river, while the little flotilla of canoes was passing.

"I feel certain there is some malign influence at work, behind the scenes," Dick heard him telling Captain Clark, after they had seen a manifestation of this ill humor one day, when several half-naked red skins brandished their spears toward them as the boats drifted past, at the same time uttering angry cries; "and, since we happen to know that Lascelles slipped past us down the river, there can be no doubt it is his work."

"A few days more and we shall be there, the captain says," announced Roger, as he made his way back a short distance up the river in company with his chum, they having noticed signs of game.

The boys had gone about half a mile from the camp, having caught sight of a feeding deer.

"We are getting close to the spot where we glimpsed that deer feeding on the green grass, so let us stop talking, and be on the watch," Dick suggested, thinking the animal might have moved from its place.

Three minutes afterwards Roger gave a low "hist."

"I can see him right now," he whispered, and, following the direction of the extended finger, Dick also caught sight of the dun-colored figure.

Really it must have been a very hungry deer. As a rule such an animal, when feeding, is so nervous and suspicious that every minute or so its tail will whisk, and the hunters know from this that the deer will immediately raise its head to take a look around. But although the boys

as they advanced kept their eyes fastened closely on their intended quarry, they could not see even the slightest movement.

Roger had begged the privilege of having first shot, and, when they had crept as close as seemed wise, his gun-stock came up against his cheek, his eye ran along the sights, and then his finger pressed the hair trigger of the long-barreled rifle.

Strange to say, the deer never moved even then. Roger was more than amazed.

"Give him a shot, Dick!" he cried, "or he may get away from us yet, thanks to my poor aim!"

Dick was about to comply, when suddenly the deer toppled over. There was something decidedly suspicious in the way the animal collapsed, and Dick had a flash of intelligence sweep over him. He believed the deer was being used for a stalking animal, and had been dead all the while, its body propped up to deceive them. And even as this dreadful truth struck him, he heard loud Indian whoops ring out.

CHAPTER XXX

A MOMENT OF PERIL

"WE are done for!" cried Roger, as vociferous yells from various quarters told of the sudden peril that had burst upon them.

The pioneer boys had often, when sitting at the knees of their fathers, heard how the crafty Indians along the Ohio River, wishing to coax the settlers ashore when they drifted down the stream in their shanty boats, would resort to a ruse.

There were white renegades among the natives, men like Simon Girty, who had been chased out of the settlements for wrong-doing, and who, hating their kind, had joined fortunes with the red tribes.

One of these turncoats would disguise himself, and set up a plaintive appeal for help, claiming to be an honest man, who had just escaped from the torture post of the Indians, and begging the newcomers not to forsake him.

In a few instances his appeals would touch

the hearts of the whites, so that, even against their good judgment, they were known to work the flatboat near the bank. Of course an attack always followed, the Indians springing up from their places of concealment.

Dick remembered those thrilling stories now, when he and Roger were victims of a ruse along similar lines. That dummy deer had been placed so it could be seen by those in the canoes. The master mind capable of conceiving this trick knew well that the two lads were born hunters, and, in the need of fresh meat for the camp, could hardly resist the temptation.

The game had worked only too well. So cleverly had the dead deer been arranged that even their sharp eyes had failed to detect anything wrong, except that the animal seemed to remain persistently in one spot, and never raised his head.

Almost immediately, flitting forms were seen among the trees. The boys did not stop to count them, but there must certainly have been a full dozen of the enemy.

Two figures they glimpsed that were not copper-colored, and nearly destitute of clothing, as was the case with the Flat Head braves. There was no need to call out and announce their discovery, for both boys realized in a flash that they were once again face to face with the evil genius of their lives, the French trader, François Lascelles, together with his equally unscrupulous ally, Andrew Waller.

Roger, with his customary impulsiveness, felt a wave of hot indignation sweep over him. This man, whom they had never sought to harm, had followed them ever since they set out from their homes on the lower Missouri, bent on saving the Armstrong property. Many times had they suffered from his persecution, and no one could really blame Roger for feeling bitterly toward the trader.

Influenced by his impulsive and headstrong nature, he hastily threw his gun up to his shoulder, and, covering the advancing Frenchman, pulled the trigger.

No report followed, which at the moment was a bitter disappointment to Roger, with his mind so set on settling the score then and there. Of course, it flashed upon him that he could not expect his gun to load itself, since he had just fired the one bullet it contained into the deer that had been used as a decoy.

With a cry of anger he turned, and, almost before Dick knew what was up, had snatched the loaded rifle from his hands, thrusting his own useless weapon into his chum's grasp.

But the two renegades saw him do this, and realized their danger, for, though the exchange took but a couple of seconds, they had had sufficient warning to put stout trees between themselves and the angry boy.

When Roger whirled around, bent on carrying out his design, he was just in time to see Waller vanish behind a tree. It was a foregone conclusion that the quick-witted Lascelles had been even faster in his movements, since he knew well that he must be the object of the lad's blind anger.

Indians there were in sight, running toward them, and brandishing their tomahawks and spears threateningly, at the same time dodging behind various trees as if to confuse the "palefaces."

Evidently they feared those wonderful sticks that spat out fire, and made a sound like unto the near-by thunder, as well as mysteriously slew whatever they were pointed at.

"We must run for it, Roger!" cried Dick, seeing that it was folly to think of trying to stand off a dozen savages with but one loaded gun between them. "All right!" gasped Roger, as he swung around and put himself in motion, for it was plain to be seen that not a second should be lost if they hoped to outwit the enemy.

No sooner was their intention evident than a new burst of wild yells told that the Indians were in hot pursuit. High above the fiendish cries Dick could hear the heavier voices of the two treacherous white men, and he knew that Lascelles and Waller must be keeping in the van of their pursuers.

The boys might have turned and tried to frighten the Indians off by a second shot, but it would be losing precious time, and every second must count when their lives hung in the balance.

The boys were clever runners, and under ordinary conditions might have been able to keep well ahead of the fleet-footed Indians. There was one unfortunate thing, however, that promised to hamper them sadly, and it concerned Roger's ability to keep up the pace.

Several days before, almost a week in fact, he had turned his ankle, and had ever since complained of feeling it pain him from time to time, especially if he gave that foot any sort of a wrench.

He had not taken a score of leaps when his toe chanced to catch in a root, and, while the boy did not measure his length on the ground, he did feel a sharp pain shoot through that weak ankle.

It made his heart sink to realize that he was bound to feel it worse with every bound he took, and that in the end it might be the means of their downfall.

Dick had kept close to the river-bank in his flight. He did this for several good reasons. In the first place, they had come that way, and knew the ground more or less. Then, again, the camp lay up the river, and, if help was to meet them part way, they must head straight for the boats.

He was inclined at first to try to shout, in the expectation that those in camp would come to their assistance the faster; but, on second thought, he realized it would only be wasting his breath. Surely they must have heard the sound of Roger's rifle, and those wild whoops bursting on their ears soon afterwards would tell their friends what had happened.

He fully believed Captain Clark would sally forth with some of the men, bent on attempting their rescue. It was only a question of keeping ahead of their persistent pursuers long enough to allow the others to come up.

"Faster, Roger, faster!"

Roger heard his comrade say this and he strove his utmost to obey, but the injured ankle was giving him more trouble every second and, despite his efforts, he failed to keep up to his usual standard of speed.

"My ankle—I've hurt it again!" he called out, between his set teeth.

Dick heard this with a thrill of horror. It seemed to seal their fate, for, if they could not increase their speed, the Indians were bound to overtake them long before any help might arrive.

He tried to catch hold of Roger's arm, as though his first thought was to render assistance; but that was impossible when running as they were. Roger indeed shook himself free.

"Save yourself, Dick! I'm nearly done for!" he exclaimed.

Dick did not try to answer. He needed all his breath to carry him along; but, if he had spoken, it would have been to scorn indignantly the suggestion that he leave his chum behind, and look out for himself. Dick was not that kind of boy; and if need be he would stand by Roger, fighting to the end.

There was the swift-running river just beside them. Dick wished from the bottom of his heart that they could in some way make use of it in order to give their pursuers the slip; yet he could not decide how it could be accomplished.

If they jumped in, and attempted to swim across, there were undoubtedly among the half-naked braves many who could make faster progress, unhampered as they would be with clothes. Oh! if only one of the boats would shoot into view, manned by a couple of the brave fellows whose guns would soon work havoc among the natives and put them to flight!

Dick saw no chance of obtaining help from that quarter. The ground underfoot was now slippery, and he remembered that they had passed over a place where the earth seemed spongy.

He could only see one hope left. This was for them to seek refuge behind trees, and try to hold the enemy at bay long enough to enable their friends to arrive on the spot. And, since the Indians might rush them despite their threatening guns, this seemed almost like a forlorn hope.

CHAPTER XXXI

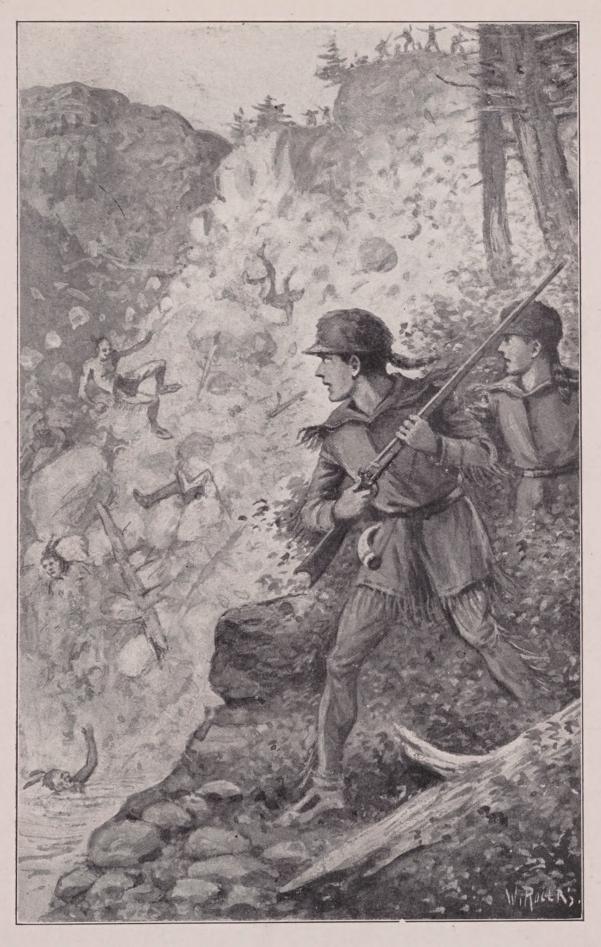
THE END OF THE LONG TRAIL

It was just at that critical moment that something wholly unexpected happened. As long as they lived Dick and Roger believed that the Providence that had so long watched over their fortunes, seeing their terrible distress, had come to the rescue.

They heard a sudden sound that bewildered them at first. It was a horrible sucking noise, and both lads actually felt the ground quivering under their feet.

Instinctively they came to a pause, as the yells back of them changed to cries of great fear, some of which seemed to be half-muffled. There was, accompanying these sounds, a strange splashing, and the crash of trees going down.

As the boys whirled around, stunned by all these remarkable sounds, they looked upon one of the most terrifying spectacles that had ever come before them. A large section of the bank



"FULLY HALF OF THE FLAT HEAD INDIANS WENT WITH THE LANDSLIDE"

of the river, where they had found it so wet in passing, had suddenly let go while the Indians were crossing it, and, together with a number of trees, had slipped into the deep river. Fully half of the Flat Head Indians went with the landslide, together with both of the renegades.

Dick plainly discovered Lascelles throwing up his arms in an agony of fear, as he found himself being dragged along, with those tons and tons of earth, into a watery grave. Then a great tree smashed down directly over him and that was the last that human eyes ever saw of the French trader.

The rest of the Indians stood there spell-bound, just as the two boys did. Superstitious to the core, those who were left must have believed this calamity could only be looked on as a manifestation of anger on the part of the Great Manitou, who doubtless held the strange boys, with the white skins, under his protection.

They made not the slightest attempt to rescue their unfortunate comrades, but, uttering cries of terror, vanished in the depths of the forest, doubtless carrying to their village a terrible story of what had occurred, to cause weeping and wailing among the lodges of the Flat Heads. Still watching, the boys saw several figures climb up out of the agitated waters. They were in every instance the copper-colored natives, who went limping away, looking back in abject terror.

Though they watched closely, the boys could discover not the slightest trace of either of the renegades. The trees floated off, or remained there sunk in the water; but a close examination of the scene of the landslide convinced Dick and Roger they had surely seen the last of their bitter enemies.

The two boys could not express their emotion except by clasping each other's hands and squeezing them fiercely. Their safety had been brought about through no mortal agency; and it was not singular that they always looked upon the landslide as a miracle wrought in their interest.

Shortly afterwards, when Dick had taken his own gun, and Roger managed to get a load in his weapon, they heard the sound of voices, and some of the men from the camp appeared. Just as the boys had anticipated, they were led by brave Captain Clark.

Great was their amazement when they heard the wonderful story the lads had to tell. It seemed almost unbelievable, and yet there was the evidence before their very eyes, the gap in the river bank, the fallen trees, and even some of the Indian tomahawks on the ground where they had been cast when the remainder of the band fled in dismay from the fatal spot.

When Captain Lewis was told about it, he declared it to be the judgment of Heaven upon the heads of those two wicked men. They had sought to stir up the resentment of the Flat Heads against the little party, and, had their plans succeeded, the members of the expedition would be in constant danger of their lives during the whole of the coming winter.

As it was, the Indians must believe the white wanderers were under the protection of Manitou, and should not be harmed. Captain Lewis could see how a peace could be made with their leading chiefs, so that, for the months that were to come, the red men and their "paleface" brothers should live together as friends.

After all their trials and tribulations things seemed to be working in the boys' favor at last. With the disappearance of the scheming trader their greatest source of uneasiness had vanished. The future looked bright once more, and the boys felt they could sleep without fearing

that something terrible hung over their heads.

That night was really the happiest they had all known for many months. The fact that they were close to the goal that had tempted them across the continent did much to bring smiles to the careworn faces of the voyagers.

"If all the accounts we've been able to pick up are correct," Dick told Roger that night, while they sat near the fire, the camp being well guarded every minute of the time, "we ought to reach our destination by the end of the second day, perhaps sooner."

"Which means we will be able to look out into the west and see nothing but the vast ocean," Roger added, with a contented sigh. "Well, I feel glad—yes, doubly glad, for Captain Lewis and Captain Clark."

"I understand why you say that, Roger. To us it means only that our curiosity will be satisfied; but think what they have risked to carry out the plan of the President! It will be the greatest day in their lives when they reach that ocean they have come thousands of miles to look upon."

"And think of all they have braved to win their end," added the other boy, his whole expression speaking his deepest admiration for the bold leaders of the exploring expedition.

Well might the boys say what they did. A thousand perils had waylaid those daring spirits, yet never once had they dreamed of giving up their plan. Over unknown trails, through dark canyons, across trackless plains and burning deserts, up mighty rivers with their strong currents and swirling rapids—all these and uncounted other dangers had spread out before them, but without daunting their souls.

No wonder then that the boy of to-day, who reads of this most wonderful journey ever undertaken in our great country, reveres the names of those two bold spirits who conducted the expedition to a successful finish.

With the coming of another day the journey was resumed. Even the weather seemed to have undergone a fit of repentance, for the skies were now as clear as crystal, and the rainy spell had evidently passed.

Early in the morning several of the men hastened to the place where the boys had been deceived by the decoy deer. They brought back the game, since none of the thoroughly alarmed Flat Heads had dared return for the carcass.

It was easily seen just how cleverly the animal's head had been fixed by means of stout

sticks and deerskin thongs. The men also judged that it had been made to stand erect by the aid of other sticks skillfully concealed. On the whole, the boys concluded they had a story to relate that would arouse the greatest interest among the home folks, if ever they were fortunate enough to rejoin the family circle again.

Roger was glad that the remainder of the journey was to be made in the canoes, for his ankle pained him exceedingly, and he would have been unable to walk any distance without feeling much distress.

"You will have to take things easy for a while, after we get to our journey's end," Dick told him. "A sprained ankle is a bad job, and you may feel it for many weeks. I can look back and remember how long it took me to get over a wrenched ankle some years ago."

At that Roger laughed aloud.

"I haven't forgotten that time, either, let me tell you, Dick. We were off on a hunt when you tripped. How your ankle did swell up; it frightened me, I tell you! But that cold spring water helped a lot to take the swelling down."

"Yes, and I can see you now, staggering along with me on your back," continued Dick, bending a look of sincere affection upon his cousin.

"That was the heaviest load you ever undertook to tote, I wager."

"But I got there, didn't I?" demanded the other, proudly, "winded though I was. And I made you a pretty fine crutch which you hobbled around on for weeks, not being able to put your foot on the ground."

Many times, as they talked, did these fond memories of the past arise to haunt them. The further they went from their well-loved homes the sharper the pictures seemed to become in their minds. Their dreams were mostly of those dear ones whose faces were forever before them, in the clear waters, while threading the mazes of the forest, or even looking out upon the glittering sands of the burning desert.

When, that afternoon, a halt was made, Captain Lewis cheered them with the announcement that there could be little doubt they would reach the mouth of the big river by the following night at the latest. Indeed, as the men had already discovered that the water was strongly impregnated with salt, they hardly needed this assurance to convince them that their long journey was on the eve of termination.

They gave the commander a hearty cheer, however, when he told them this welcome fact,

then set about making what was certainly one of the happiest camps of the entire trip.

As usual the two boys talked things over while they sat resting after supper had been dispatched. Roger had sniffed the air several times, and he finally broke out with a declaration.

"There seems to be something queer in the air, Dick; something I've never before noticed in all my life. And to tell you the truth, I can make nothing of it."

"I may be wrong," Dick told him; "but, from all I've heard grandfather say, I think that must be the salty taste they say one can notice when the air comes straight off the sea. If that is so, it proves we are close to the mouth of the river right now."

After that Roger amused himself by sniffing the air many times. It seemed to give him fresh encouragement to have a silent but powerful proof carried by the night breeze to their river camp.

Taken in all, it was a rather restless night for some of the adventurers, and the boys in particular awoke many times, to sit up and listen. Once Dick even fancied he could hear a far-off, dull, booming sound that could hardly be thunder, since the stars were out, and not a cloud as big as his hand in sight.

"I wonder," the boy said softly to himself, with a feeling almost of awe, "if that can be the sea pounding on the shore. Grandfather has often told us how it makes a great noise when the tide is coming in, each wave running along and turning over as it breaks on the sand."

He even sat there for a long while listening, though thinking it best not to arouse Roger, who chanced to be sleeping at the time. Only when the strange sound died out, owing to a change of wind, or the turn of the tide, Dick consented once more to drop back in his blanket. But, when he did get to sleep again, his dreams were of the glorious triumph that awaited them close at hand.

The last day dawned, and the camp was early astir. Breakfast was hastily eaten, the small amount of boat packing attended to, and after that a start was made.

To-day the paddles were seldom idle. Spurred on by the hope of reaching their goal before darkness again intervened, the men were only too willing to work their passage. The swift current might be very well under ordinary

conditions, but on this particular day it proved all too slow for their eager hearts.

They glimpsed Indians several times, but, strange to say, none of them manifested the antagonistic manner of those they had seen earlier in their trip down the Lewis and the Columbia rivers.

Roger, who had noticed the change in the demeanor of the natives, wondered what was the cause of it, and as usual applied to Dick for his opinion.

"They are of the same tribe," he remarked, "for by now I know the Flat Head way of wearing feathers in their scalp-locks. But they seem now to be afraid of us, for those in that dugout paddled frantically for the shore; and never an arrow comes our way now. Can you make it out, Dick?"

"The only thing I can think of," Dick replied,
"is that word has been sent out everywhere
that the 'paleface people' in the hide canoes are
under the protection of Manitou, and that no
harm must be done to them."

"Well," observed Roger, with a happy smile, "if we're going to be guarded by the Indian Manitou all winter, we needn't be afraid of anything. When you come to think of it, Dick, that

landslide was the greatest thing that ever happened to us. It held back just long enough to let us pass, and then swallowed our enemies up."

Noon came and went.

The men were so eager now they hardly wished to land to have something to eat, though Captain Lewis insisted on it, for he knew they needed a rest.

Slowly the long afternoon passed, and, constantly on the move, the canoes swept along the current, urged by the muscles that seemed never to tire. Hope fought with a growing disappointment. Were they then, after all, to be cheated out of the anticipated triumph they had arranged for that night? Perish the thought! and, with that, the paddlers would dip deeper, and run a race to see which could hold the van.

The sun sank lower and lower, and every eye watched its race with almost the same anxiety as was shown when, centuries back, Joshua commanded the heavenly luminary to stand still in order that his army might wholly destroy the Philistines.

Dick and Roger concluded that, unless something happened inside of another hour, they would have to give up all hope of seeing the glad sight that day.

"We are about to turn a bend in the bank right below," Dick told Roger, "and, if all is well, perhaps we may see what we are yearning to look upon."

All possible speed was made in order to turn the point of land covered with trees, that jutted out into the river. Then from every throat arose a joyous shout that made the echoes ring. It was the very first white man's hurrah that was ever heard on the western side of the great American continent, north of the isthmus, since time began.

There lay the mouth of the Columbia River, and, looking beyond, they could see the bound-less expanse of the Pacific, with the sun, that had beckoned them on all these thousands of miles, setting in a red blaze of glory.

CHAPTER XXXII

TO THE RISING SUN-CONCLUSION

On the following day the flag of the United States floated from the green hills of Columbia Bay. And, when the adventurers had become thoroughly rested, they began to discuss the matter as to where they would stay during the coming winter.

Just what sort of severe weather they might expect none of them, of course, knew. In those early days nothing was understood with reference to the famous warm Japan ocean current, which does for the Pacific coast what the Gulf Stream accomplishes for much of our eastern shore, as well as for Europe.

So cabins were finally built, in which they hoped to keep fairly comfortable, and by degrees a supply of meat was laid in for consumption during the winter, if the cold should be prolonged like a Canadian season.

They soon found that the Indians meant to be friendly, and all fear of trouble from this source was laid to rest. As the days and weeks crept on they explored some of the surrounding country, and even tried to make rude maps of it to show when they returned East.

Dick and Roger did their full share in everything that went on. Much of the meat that was dried that winter, in order to provide a supply on the return trip over the mountains and down the Missouri, fell before their guns.

They were also instrumental in helping to tan some of the skins to be used in making necessary clothing for the men. Having been almost two years on the trail, some of the members of the expedition were sadly in need of garments; and this well-tanned buckskin supplied the deficiency admirably, for in those pioneer days every man was his own tailor.

It would hardly be fitting here to try to tell the many things that occupied their attention as the winter months passed; but they were busy most of the time. To the surprise of all the weather never became severe. Snow they saw on the sides of the mountains, but, taken in all, they suffered very little from cold, a fact that astonished them very much.

Finally the spring came, and all eyes were eagerly turned toward the rising sun; for it was

known that the time was now near at hand when they must start upon the return trip.

The ties that drew them all, men and boys, to the East were many and strong. Their hearts often swelled with emotion as they thought of those from whom they had been separated so many months.

"Why," Roger was accustomed to saying, when he and his chum discussed the time of their departure, now close at hand, "I feel sure I will never know my little sister, Mary, when I see her again; she must be such a big girl by now. And as for your brother, Sam, you may find him able to give you a good tussle in a wrestle."

Thus they often talked of their loved ones, but neither of the boys ever dared express the one dread fear that sometimes tugged at their heartstrings, which was that they might find some face missing in the family circle when they reached home again.

Toward the end of March, everything being favorable, they once more started up the broad Columbia, saying farewell to the place where they had passed such a contented winter. No serious illness had visited them, and all were very anxious to get started.

Reaching the village of the Nez Perces, they

had no difficulty in claiming their horses, which had survived the winter. And, having made many presents to their red friends, the adventurers again set forth.

They had a faithful guide this time who showed them how to avoid some of the worst of the burning desert. The changed season of the year also aided them, so that, in the end, they reached in safety the lofty barrier that divided the continent.

Crossing the Rocky Mountains they proceeded to where they had left their companions, and were fortunate enough to find them safe and sound. It was a joyous reunion all around.

They had troubles with the Indians, though as a rule they found the red men inclined to be friendly; and, in return for medicine and services rendered, received many favors at the hands of the natives, including much-needed meat.

Once, among the Blackfeet, they were forced to make a hasty flight, when some of the thievish Indians tried to steal their horses; and in the mêlée a brave was shot, though the animals were saved.

When finally the Missouri was reached the party set to work to make new canoes, having by degrees lost their horses or traded them with the Indians for necessities. Captain Lewis knew that for the hundreds of miles they now had to traverse, boats would be far more preferable to horses, because the going was all downstream, with a swift current, the river being in its spring flood.

Some of the canoes they made themselves, others were purchased from the Indians; in this way enough were provided to carry the entire party.

Day after day they kept pushing resolutely down the great river, camping by night on the bank. The summer was already well along, and they knew it would be close to October before they could expect to make the village of St. Louis, the first settlement on their course.

It was just about the end of September when they did arrive, and the event created the most intense excitement ever known in that border post. Most people, who had seen the expedition set forth nearly two and a half years back, believed the brave captains and all with them had perished.

When Mayhew, the scout, had shown up, bearing the precious paper which meant so much to the Armstrongs, he had, of course, brought news; and it was known that the expedition had

reached a place near the far distant headwaters of the Missouri; but since then weary months of waiting had ensued, with never a word, and hope beat but faintly in those fond hearts at home.

It was a joyous meeting. Roger could hardly believe the tall girl who threw her arms about his neck was his little sister, Mary; and as for Sam, he bade fair to soon look down on Dick, he was growing so fast.

Grandfather and Grandmother Armstrong were both there, hale and hearty, and mighty proud of their two sturdy grandsons, who had made that wonderful trip to the western sea in company with the President's private secretary.

The whole country applauded the hardy men who had done this great feat, and with reason, for, as one account says:

"They were world conquerers in the best sense, in that they had blazed the way for thousands of sturdy homeseekers who soon followed in their wake, building homes, cities, manufacturing plants, railroads and telegraph lines where once had roamed the lordly bison, the herds of dun-colored antelope, the vast bodies of stately elk; and where, in the silence of the mountains and the forest the grizzly bear—monarch of the plains and the valleys—had moved in the peace and seclusion of the vast wilderness."

In later years, after the original pioneers of the Armstrong family had been gathered to their fathers, the families scattered, as new things arose to lure some of the younger members further into the wide West.

They have settled, the newer generations of them, some in Oregon, along the mighty Columbia which Dick and Roger were among the first whites to see; others on wheat growing farms in Dakota, or else on cattle ranches in Montana; though there can still be found Armstrongs in St. Louis, proud to trace their ancestry back to those bold pioneers whose early history we have attempted to narrate in these volumes.

Jasper Williams often visited his young friends when he came to the growing settlement at the junction of the Missouri with the Mississippi. He lived to dandle the children of Dick and Roger on his knee, and tell them many of the exciting adventures which those two bold lads encountered when crossing the Great Divide with Lewis and Clark.

Nothing was ever heard of either Lascelles or

Andrew Waller, and the boys never entertained a doubt but that the renegades met their fate in that strange landslide by which they had been precipitated into the Columbia.

And, since we have seen the safe return of the wanderers, and watched the happy ending of their great adventure, it is but right that we bring our story of early pioneer days to a close.

THE END

NOTES

NOTE 1 (PAGE 5)

When the vast territory then known as Louisiana was purchased from the French Nation for fifteen million dollars, in the nineteenth century, no one knew what its extent was. It took in the country west of the Mississippi, from the Gulf below New Orleans; but what really lay to the far northwest was merely a conjecture.

President Jefferson was determined to know just what was included in this Louisiana Purchase, and it was mainly through his individual efforts that an expedition was organized with the purpose of exploring the country as far as the Pacific; for, of course, it was understood that the ocean bounded the land on the west.

His private secretary, Meriwether Lewis, was put in command of the party, with a military second, Captain Clark. What wonderful things they accomplished history has recorded. It was in the spring of 1804 that the expedition left St. Louis, and two years and a half expired before they returned to that border post, having successfully carried out their undertaking.

NOTE 2 (PAGE 22)

In those early pioneer days flint and steel were commonly brought into service when a fire was needed. So expert did the settlers and borderers become in the use of these that they thought little more of accomplishing the end they had in view than a Boy Scout of to-day does with the match. All they asked was a handful of dry tinder, and the ready spark quickly had a blaze going.

It was not so easy when the question of firing their guns was concerned. The flint was fastened to the heavy hammer, and, in falling, was supposed to strike the steel plate provided for this purpose, when a spark might be looked for. This, falling into the powder placed in the little cavity known as the "pan," brought about the explosion. But, frequently, this small amount of powder would be jostled from its receptacle, and this would cause a failure at perhaps a most critical time. Many a settler in those days lost his life by just this accident; and frequent disappointments during a hunt for game could be traced to the same cause.

Note 3 (PAGE 44)

Contact with the natives made the early settlers quite proficient in deciphering Indian picture writing, so they were able to read fairly well many communications passing between parties of those who possibly might be reckoned their deadly enemies. This method of using crude designs to convey the sense of a communication, or even the history of a tribe or family, was often carried out by fanciful pictures decorating the skin of which the teepee was made. In such fashion many of the gallant deeds of the chief or warrior to whom the wigwam belonged were perpetuated.

Really, little common sense alone is needed to decipher most of these picture writings. Once the key had been found, they become as plain as print. Smoke stands for fires; the sun is easily seen on the horizon, or high above it, though toward the west, it may be; horses; deer with antlers; men walking, running, or crawling; and similar designs become plainly decipherable; and in this manner the story that is intended to be conveyed can be traced out.

It is an interesting study, and many who belong to Boy Scout troops have found considerable entertainment in pursuing the fascinating work.

NOTE 4 (PAGE 50)

Among all the Indian tribes found upon the North American Continent when the pioneers surged toward the setting sun, none has interested the historian so much as the Mandans, sometimes called the "White Indians," because their skins differed so much from that of other tribes. All sorts of wild theories have been offered as an explanation of the wide difference existing between this tribe and others. It is true that they buried their dead as did the rest of the tribes west of the Mississippi, using scaffolds that the wolves might not get to the bodies; and there were many other habits that stamped them true Indians. At the same time historians, who had lived among them, find a similarity in many of their words and customs to the Welsh people; and it has always been believed by many that, long ago, a boat containing Welsh sailors was wrecked in the Gulf of Mexico after a tropical hurricane, and that, ascending the mighty river, the whites married into some Indian tribe, so that eventually the Mandans came into existence.

There have been other speculations, and it is very in-

teresting to read about these various theories, and try to guess which one of them can be the true explanation; for that there must have been something remarkable about the origin of this tribe no one can deny. They were not as warlike as some of the tribes with whom they came in contact, such as the fierce Sioux; but at the same time it appears that they held their own in the numerous wars which followed an invasion by one tribe upon the hunting grounds of another.

Unfortunately the Mandans were utterly wiped out in later years by the great scourge of smallpox, which possibly may have been one of the unwelcome gifts brought to them by the palefaces.

NOTE 5 (PAGE 64)

In crossing the great plains that lie between the valley of the Mississippi and the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, it is in these days difficult to realize the tremendous changes that have taken place there during the last fifty or sixty years. Especially is this true with regard to animal life. Where to-day herds of long-horned cattle graze, or vast fields of nodding grain tell of the prosperous farmer, in those times uncounted numbers of great shaggy bison roamed.

According to many of the accounts that have come down to us from authentic sources, the sight of such a herd rolling past, as far as the eye could see, and for hour after hour, must have been a most impressive spectacle.

Where have they all gone? Up to then the needs of the Indians and the depredations of wild animals had made no impression on the incredible number of the herds; although the red men often drove hundreds of the big animals over some precipice, and took nothing but the tongues, to be dried as a delicacy.

The first serious inroad among the buffaloes occurred when the railroad was being pushed across the plains, and men like Cody, afterwards known as Buffalo Bill, were employed to slaughter the beasts in order to provide sufficient food for the thousands of workers. Then it began to be the thing for parties to set out and kill for the sake of the slaughter. The robes were also brought into use for sleighing and other purposes. But the advent of the repeating rifle signed the real death warrant for the bison of the plains. Then they rapidly dwindled to almost nothing. In place of the millions that once galloped north and south in the seasons there are to-day but one or two small herds, in the National Yellowstone Park or in private preserves. Like the once numerous wild pigeons called the passenger pigeons which existed in untold numbers, the buffaloes have had their day.

NOTE 6 (PAGE 194)

In the cabin of every pioneer family could always be seen rows of dried herbs fastened to the rafters. These as a rule were intended for medicinal purposes, most of them being brewed into tea, when sickness invaded the household, which was not often, since the active outdoor life, and the primitive food of the early settlers, made them an exceedingly hardy race.

Most housewives knew how to make ointments for sprains and healing by a clever admixture of these strong decoctions with bear's fat, or, if they chanced to have it, pork lard, though in most cases pigs were unknown to frontier life, while a bear was always a possibility.

Many of those old remedies were fully as satisfactory as those of the modern druggist. They were pure, to begin with, and calculated not to serve as "curealls," but each intended for a specific purpose. Indeed, it would seem as if in those days they counted on Nature's taking hold and lending a helping hand. A simple remedy to break a fever was resorted to, and then careful nursing, as well as a good constitution, did the rest.

Before the Armstrong boys set out upon their trip it was only natural for their mothers to see that in their ditty bags they carried a supply of several of these standard remedies.

NOTE 7 (PAGE 233)

From the accounts that have been handed down to us, written by Captain Lewis himself, it appears that the explorers were awed and inspired by the wonderful scenery that lay before them on their way to the Great Divide. Rugged mountains were there, brown, steep, hemlock-clad. Deep game trails led through the tangled meshes of the forest, and in the sparkling rivulets the trout jumped at the floating gnats and other insects. Gorges and canyons had to be passed, where the howling waters raced in an apparent agony, and flute-like came the sound of the snow-cold water against the pebbly bottoms.

At night the scream of the mountain lion echoed across the silent valleys, while the bleat of the antelope could be heard upon the vast plains near the river-bed. Eagles soared above, peering disdainfully at the black specks of men beneath; and sage hens craned their necks at them, when they tramped from the river in

search of game. Over all was the clear, pure air of that vast mountain plateau, which invigorates, stimulates, and makes one feel as if he had the strength of ten. Inspired and stimulated by the thought that they were making history, it is no wonder those men pressed steadily on, determined to view the gray waters of the fog-sheeted Pacific in the end.

NOTE 8 (PAGE 268)

One of the first things noticed by the members of the expedition, when they began to encounter the tribes living near the Rockies, was the fact that every warrior or chief who was looked up to as a brave man wore a necklace of terrible bears' claws. This proved that the possessor had by his own individual prowess, and usually in an encounter at close quarters, succeeded in slaying one of those monster denizens of the wilds, afterwards known as grizzly bears.

There can be no doubt that this beast is by all odds the most savage and dreaded wild animal of the Western World. Indeed, there are those who say they would much rather meet a lion or a tiger in its native country than the grizzly bear. When an Indian, with his primitive weapons, and at the risk of his life, was able to take those claws, and string them about his neck, none could dispute his right to the title of a valiant man.

Those who have hunted big game under every sun are frank enough to say that if a grizzly bear could climb a tree like a panther, and get over ground as fast as a lion, he would stand without a peer as the most feared game to be found. In these modern days of the repeating rifle of large bore, and the exploding

bullet, it is not very difficult to kill the monster; but every one who has seen a grizzly bear in his native haunts is willing to hold in honor those red hunters of the early times, who, armed only with hatchet and knife, deliberately sought an encounter, bent on proving their right to the name of warrior.

NOTE 9 (PAGE 300)

The Indians took toll of the big silver-sided salmon as they made their way up the Columbia to spawn. They used as a rule a primitive fish spear with which they were very expert.

There were always salmon to be found at the foot of the fall, or in shallow creeks that emptied into the big river, but, when the spring finally came, the fish would pass in from the sea in multitudes beyond reckoning, all eager to get up to the shallow waters where they could spawn.

Eye witnesses of undoubted veracity have described the scene where, in places, the multitude of these big fish was so great that they filled the stream with a solid mass.

Of course those days are past. In these times, when numerous canneries are operating along the river, and millions of tins of fish are put up every season, it could hardly be expected that the supply would continue in unlimited quantities. Though as yet there has been no serious inroad made, thanks to the action of the Federal Government, and the work of the active Fish Commissioners, who see to it that the fish wheels, by means of which catches are made, are regulated according to law. Still the sight of the untold numbers that greeted the eyes of the explorers on that early spring of 1806 has passed forever.

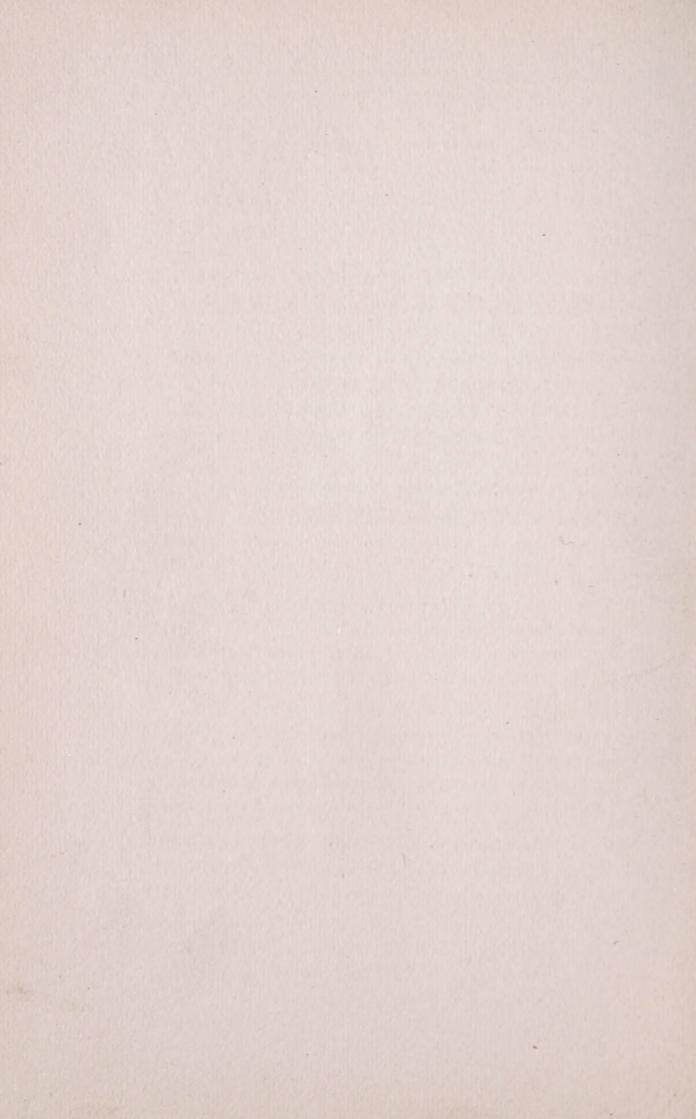
NOTE 10 (PAGE 305)

The fear sometimes felt by the explorers that the Indians were using poisoned arrows was not unfounded, since it was well known that some of the tribes resorted to this fiendish practice, with the flint-tipped weapons intended for war purposes.

Their usual way of making the arrows deadly was to find a healthy looking rattlesnake, and provoke him by thrusts from a long stick. When the reptile had become sufficiently furious, and was lunging madly, a piece of raw meat would be fastened to the end of the pole, and this he was coaxed to strike again and again, until it was well saturated with the green virus from his fangs.

When this infected meat had become a mass of poison, arrows were dipped in it, and allowed to dry. Once these entered the flesh of an enemy, as a rule his death was certain. Of course an entirely different lot of arrows would be used for hunting purposes, the deadly sort being kept only for war.

History however does not record many deaths from this source, so it must be taken for granted that, as a rule, the Indians disliked resorting to such a severe measure of defense. Possibly it did not appeal to them as exactly fair, and they were more than ready to measure their tomahawks and knives and spears, as well as their ordinary arrows, against the guns owned by the white men. Certainly no one of the Lewis and Clark party suffered from poisoned arrows during the long journey across the western country.



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